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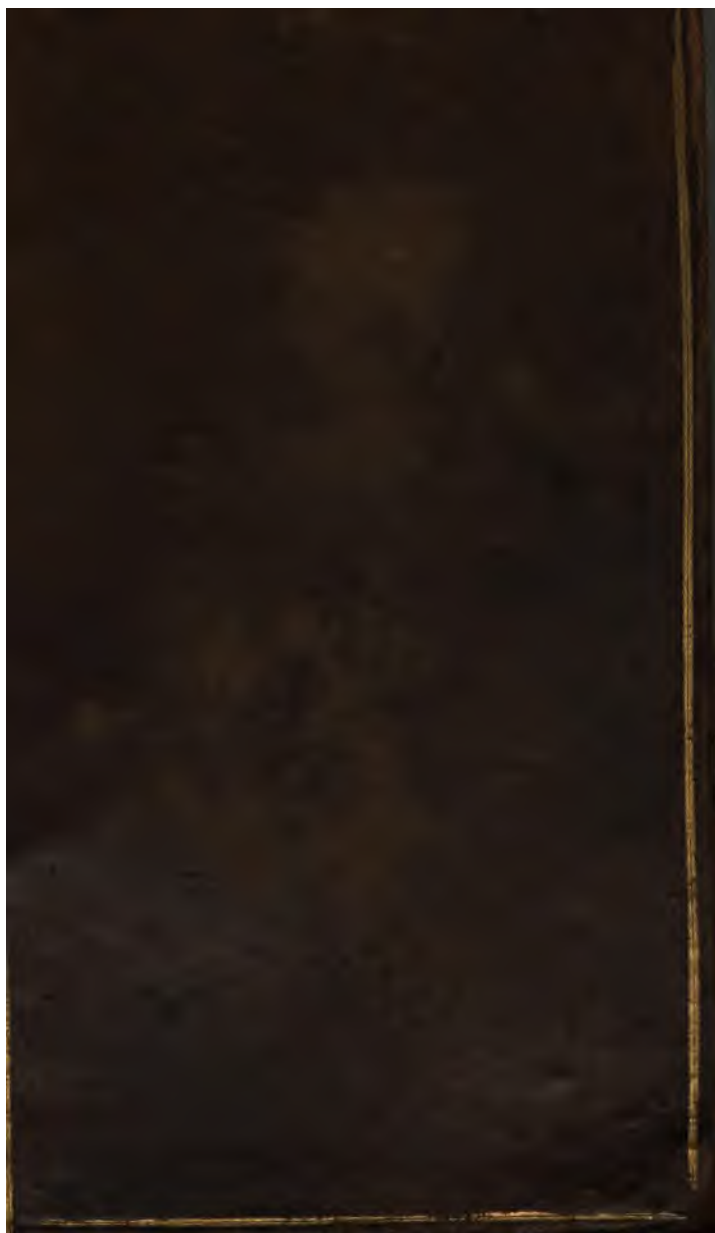
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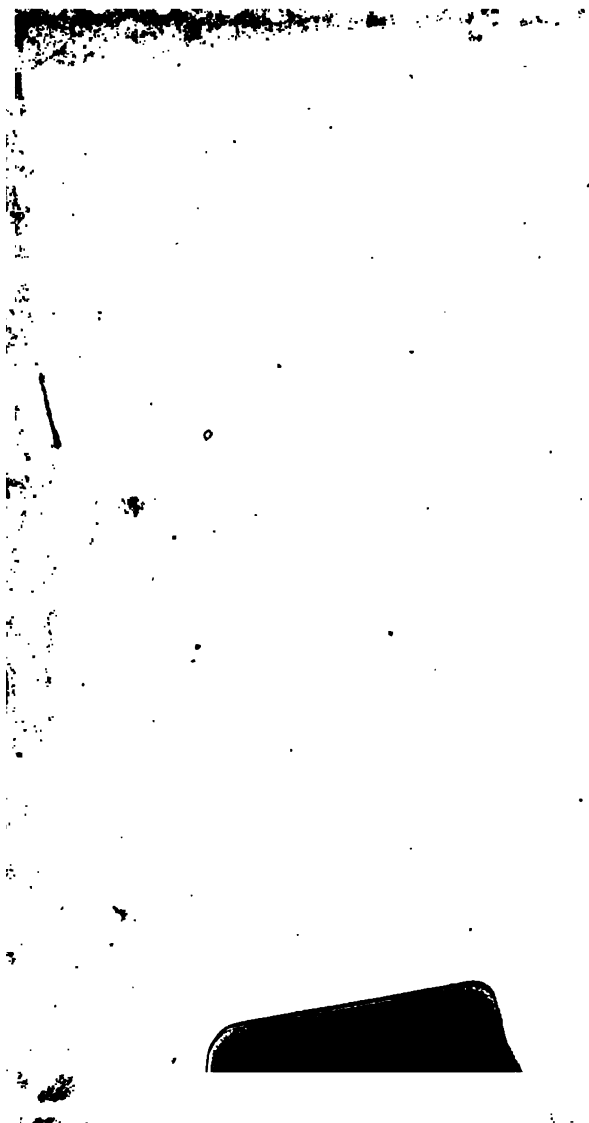
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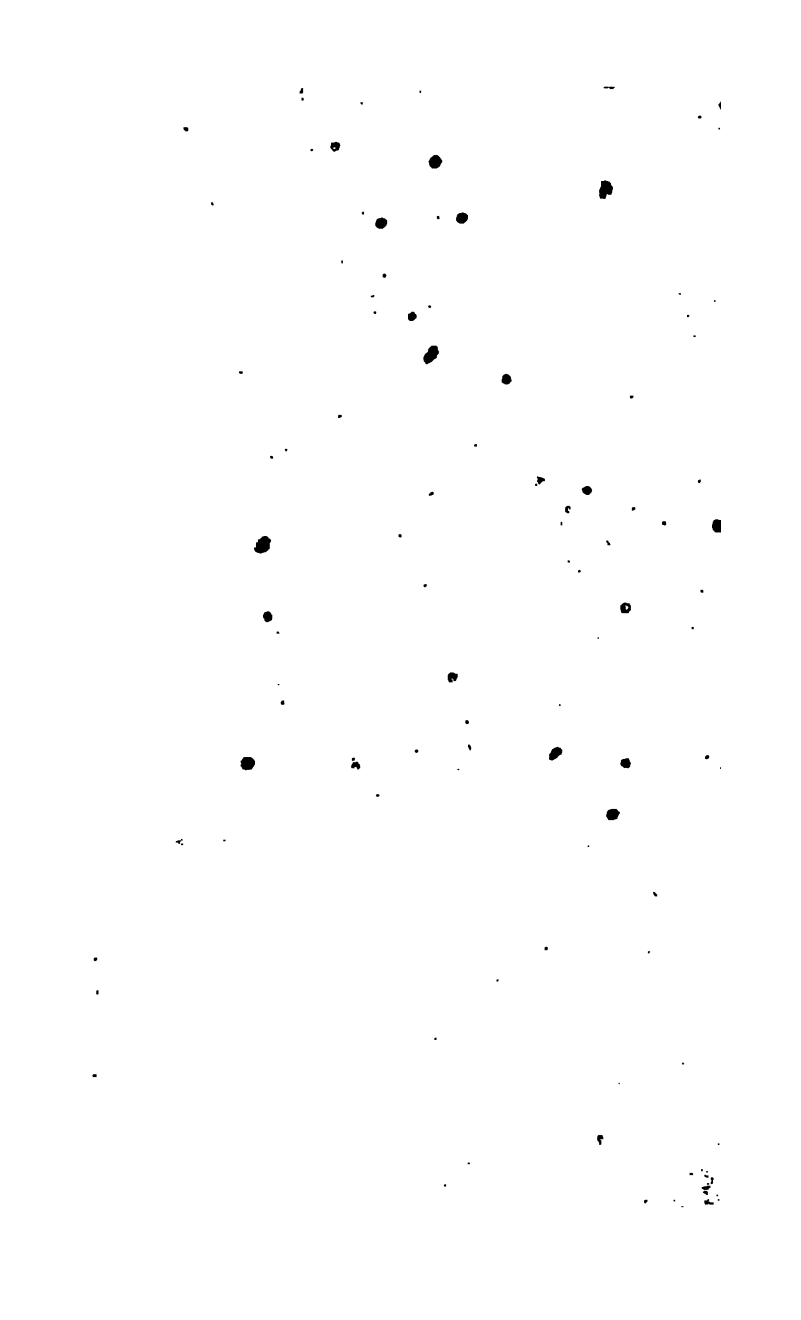
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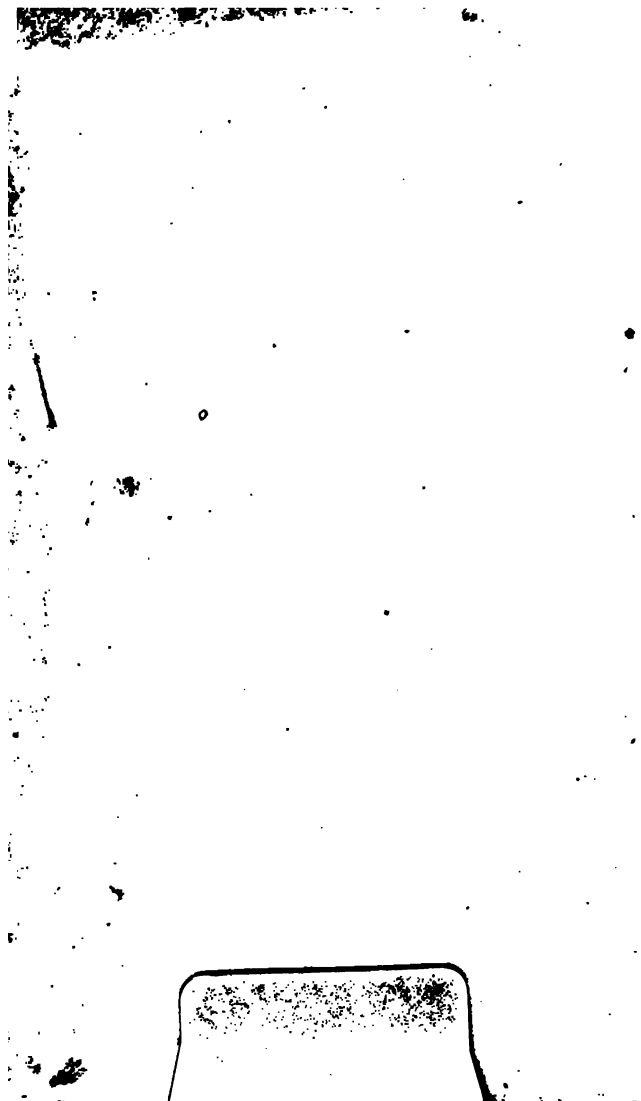
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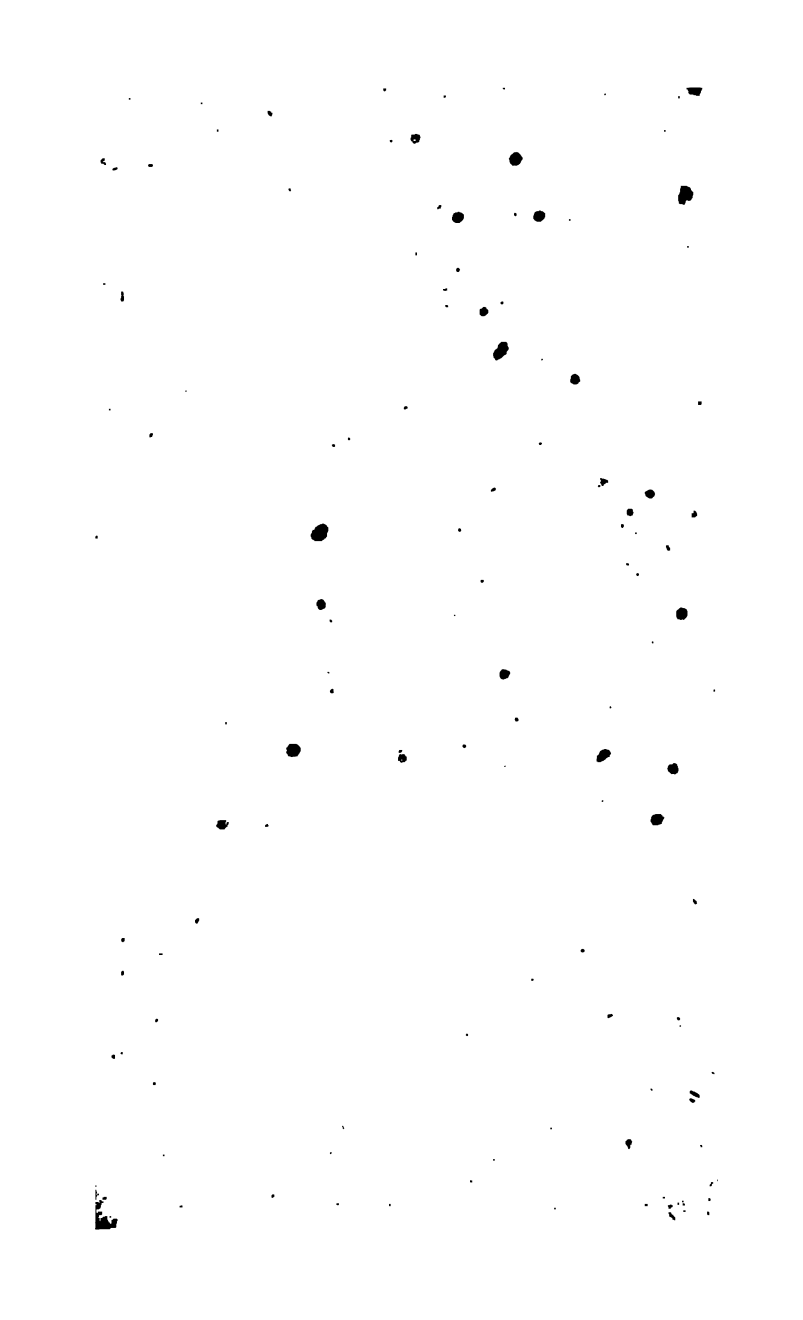
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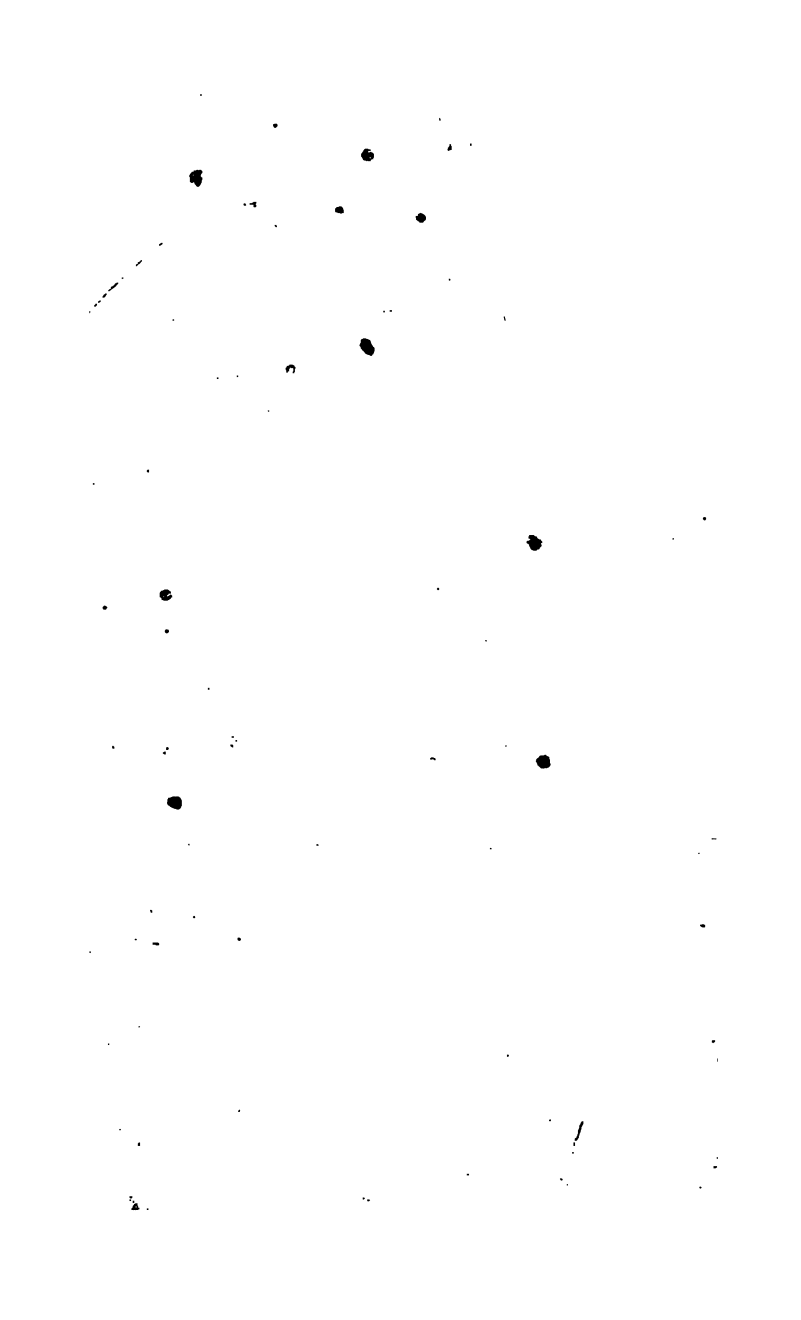












M O R A L
ENTERTAINMENTS
On the most Important
PRACTICAL TRUTHS
O F T H E
Christian Religion.

In THREE VOLUMES.

By *ROBERT MANNING.*

V O L. II.



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T H E

XXth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Idea the Saints had of Heaven.

*The Sufferings of this present Time are not
worthy to be compared with the Glory which
shall be reveal'd in us. Rom. viii. 18.*



THE Sufferings of this Life bear certainly no Proportion to the Joys prepared in Heaven. Because the Sufferings of this Life are short, and the Joys of Heaven are everlasting. The Sufferings of this Life are never without some Mixture of Comfort, and the Joys of Heaven are pure and unmix'd. Finally, the Sufferings of this Life can never exceed a certain Degree of Violence, being
Tom. II. B limited

limited by the natural Weakness of the Body ; but the Joys of Heaven being subjected in an incorruptible and immortal Soul are as boundless as her Appetites and Desires, which can only be satisfied with the Possession of an infinite Good.

This made the Saints both of the old and new Law set so high a Value upon Heaven, as to strive to purchase it with the most laborious Endeavours, and the most painful Sufferings either inflicted by others, or of their own free Choice. St. Paul gives us this Account of some Part of their Sufferings: *Others were tortured not accepting Deliverance, that they might obtain a better Resurrection. And others had Trial of cruel Mockings and Scourgings, yea, moreover of Bonds and Imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the Sword. They wander'd about in Sheep-skins and Goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the World was not worthy. They wander'd in Desarts, and Mountains, and in Dens and Caves of the Earth.* Heb. xi. 35, 36. &c.

Now since Men's Actions are but the natural Result of their practical Ideas of Things ; since we cannot make a truer Judgment of the Value a Person has for any Thing, than by the Pains he takes for it, and the Price he sets up-
on

on it ; finally, since both the Ideas and Actions of the Saints ought to be the Model of ours, because it marks out clearly the Way that leads to the Happiness they possess, the whole Design of this concluding Discourse, of the *four last Things*, shall be to give you some Account of the great Ideas the Saints had of Heaven, and the Value they set upon it.

The Kingdom of Heaven is compared by our Saviour *unto a Merchant-man seeking goodly Pearls ; who when he had found one Pearl of a great Price, he went, and sold all he had, and bought it.* Matt. xiii. 45, 46. This *Pearl* is the Possession of God by *Grace* in this Life, and in *Glory* hereafter. Now that we may be encouraged to imitate this wise Merchant, in sparing no Cost or Labour to purchase so great a Treasure, we must take care to inform ourselves well of the true Value of it. The Lovers therefore of this World must not be consulted in this Matter ; because their Hearts being too sensibly affected with worldly Objects, they are apt to judge of Things with Reference to what pleases or displeases for the present. *The carnal Man* (says St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 14.) *receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God. For they are Foolishness unto him : Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discern'd.*

Hence it is, that the Lovers of this World are by the Word of God stiled *Fools* and *Children*. Because as *Fools* and *Children* have not Judgment enough to know false Stones from Diamonds, and are often better pleased with a pretty Bauble than the richest Jewel; so the Lovers of this World are much sonder of the Toys and Trifles wherewith it amuses them for the present, than the solid Treasures of the Life to come. And so it is no wonder that the Price of Heaven is fallen so low in the general Opinion of Mankind, and that so few are heartily disposed, I will not say, *to sell all they have to purchase it*, but even to do or suffer any Thing considerably for it.

But the Saints, who were animated with the Spirit of God, and had their Hearts free from all Biass of earthly Affections, are the only proper Judges in this Case. *But we (says St. Paul) have received not the Spirit of the World, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the Things, that are given unto us by God.* From these then we must learn the true Value of this *rich Pearl*; and we need but take a View of their Lives and Sufferings to be throughly convinced of the great Idea they had of it. For Deeds are the most faithful Interpreters of the Mind; and he who spares no
Pains

Moral Entertainments. 5

Pains or Cost to compass the End he aims at, shews plainly how near it lies to his Heart, and that it has the Preference to all other Things.

First then, let us consider the laborious and suffering Lives of the primitive Planters of the Gospel; I mean, the blessed *Apostles*, and other Apostolick Men, who have earn'd Heaven, as I may say, with the Labour of their Hands, and Sweat of their Brows. What Hardships have they not endured in *Hunger* and *Thirst*, *Heat* and *Cold*, *Weariness* and *Watchings*, interior *Solicitudes* and *Troubles*, *Poverty* and *Nakedness*, *Contumelies*, *Derisions* and *Persecutions*! How were they continually harass'd with long and painful Journeys to carry the Faith of Christ into barbarous and and savage Nations! What Dangers have they not run through by Land and Sea! What Difficulties have they not struggled with in Banishments and Prisons; being every where, both by Reason of their Poverty, and the mortal Hatred their Enemies bore them, destitute of the ordinary Comforts and Conveniences of Life!

And what induced these faithful Labourers in Christ's Vineyard, who naturally loved their Liberty and Ease as well as other Mortals, to undertake so difficult and laborious a Task, and continue indefatigably

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in it to their last Breath? Their Encouragement was the firm Hope they had of seeing themselves one Day rewarded with the eternal Repose of the Life to come ; *expecting the blessed Hope, and coming of the great God.* This they look'd upon not only as a sufficient but superabundant Recompence of all the Hardships and Labours they could undergo. This *blessed Hope* was the Cordial that daily gave new Life and Spirit to their Actions, and kept them from Fainting under the Burden with which they were charged. And if they regretted any Thing, it was to see how little they were able to do to answer the Bounty of a Master, who had prepared such glorious Rewards for them ; and that they had but each one single Life to employ in his Service.

In the next Place, let us take a View of all those illustrious Champions, who have gone to Heaven *through Fire and Water*, as the Scripture expresses it ; that is, through all the severest Trials that Art or Malice could invent to make the Passage frightful to them. Here we shall see innumerable Persons of all Ages and Conditions running to *Racks, Gibbets, Scourges and Axes*, with the same Eagerness and Alacrity of Mind as if they were hastening to some agreeable Entertainment: Some were torn Limb from Limb by wild Beasts ; *others thrown into boiling Cauldrons ;*
others

others broil'd alive upon Gridirons ; others nipp'd with red-hot Pincers ; others beaten to Death with Scorpions, Rods, or Plummets ; others, finally, after the mangling of their Limbs, condemn'd to undergo a lingering Martyrdom in Mines or Dungeons.

But the Manner how these Christian Heroes suffer'd, is yet more remarkable than their Sufferings. For, instead of betraying any Weakness or Impatience under the foremention'd Trials, they rather behaved themselves like Men affected with some exquisite Pleasure ; some singing Canticles of Joy ; others sporting with their Tormentors ; and all glorifying God for having judg'd them worthy to suffer in his Cause : Which plainly shews the great Idea they had of the happy State towards which they were hastening, and that they were heartily convinced with the blessed Apostle, *That the Sufferings of this present Time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be reveal'd in us.*

They doubted not but Heaven was worth infinitely more than they were able to do or suffer for it, and that it was a very advantageous Bargain to purchase eternal and incomprehensible Joys with transitory Pains, tho' never so grievous for the Time : This Consideration made Death itself, tho' in it's most terrifying Shapes, appear beauti-
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ful

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tul and charming to them. Because they regarded it only as a secure Passage to a better Life; and tho' the Passage was full of Difficulty and Terror, the blessed Land beyond it presented before their Eyes a Prospect so glorious and charming, as inspired them with a generous Resolution to break through all Difficulties, and fight to the last Drop of Blood to force their Way to it.

Lastly, let us consider the wonderful Lives of those holy Saints, whom the Church honours with the Title of *Confessors*; who, tho' they spilt not their Blood, nor laid down their Lives to obtain the Crown, yet they daily sacrificed to God their Wills and Inclinations; which, if well consider'd, will appear a Sacrifice no less generous, and in regard of it's long Continuation, perhaps more difficult, than what is offer'd with Effusion of Blood. For to live in the World, and be utterly dead to all worldly Affections, to have all the usual Inclinations of Nature, and at the same time to live in a total Contradiction to them, has something in it so tiresome and painful, that it is the Task of a more than ordinary Patience and Resolution not to be overcome or wearied by it.

Yet this hard Task many Thousands have undertaken, and gone through with it.

Moral Entertainments.

it: They denied themselves whatever Nature loves, and made Choice of every thing that is disagreeable and painful to it: They renounced the Conveniences and Diversions of Cities, to pass their Days in solitary Caves or hideous Desarts: They prefer'd Poverty to Riches, Humiliations and Contempt to Honours and Preferments, Obedience and Suffering to Liberty and Ease. In a word, their whole Time was spent in the most laborious Exercises of Penance, without any farther Allowance of Relaxation than was absolutely necessary to support Life, and prolong their painful Exile,

Now this wonderful self-denying Method of these holy Saints, shews plainly what their Thoughts were of this Life to come, and how they undervalued this World in Comparison to it; in effect, their Hearts were where their Treasure was laid up; and their Treasure being in Heaven, they look'd upon the Earth with a generous Disdain, rejecting all the Offers it could make them either of Honours, Riches, or Pleasures; and accepting no other Satisfaction for the present, than the Hopes of a blessed Eternity hereafter: So that we may justly say of them, that *having found one Pearl of a great Price, they went and sold all they had and bought it.* For they reserved nothing to themselves, not even the

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Desire of any earthly Good, but with their Wills made all over to God, *counting with the Apostle all Things as Dung, that they might gain Christ.*

Now then to draw some practical Instructions from what has been said; since these holy Saints were undoubtedly animated with, and directed by the Spirit of God, both their Judgment of Things, and the Example of their Lives carries a very great Weight, and ought to serve us as Lights to walk by. First then, we are to learn, from the Idea they had of Heaven, that we ought to regard it as our supreme Good; that all this World is nothing to it, and consequently that any earthly Thing, of whatever Moment it appears to be, if it pretends to stand in Competition with it, is to be postponed and sacrificed to it. And here no manner of Abatement can be allow'd. For whoever is not heartily convinced, that Heaven is to be prefer'd before all Things in this World, errs in the very first Principle of Christian Morality, makes the whole Gospel void, and shews himself to be in a criminal State.

But when we are well fix'd in this great Principle, and have settled a right Judgment of the happy State we are to aim at, the next Lesson we are to learn of the Saints is how to secure our Pretensions to it: And here

here we are to take Directions from the Method of their Lives. My Meaning is, not that we are bound to bear up to the Rigour of the Penances they practis'd, because they are neither proportion'd to the Measure of every one's Strength, nor consistent with all States or Conditions. And the self-same Practices, which are a Means to sanctify some, may be a Snare to others, and occasion their Ruin, if undertaken by such as are not sufficiently qualified for the Performance.

However, since it is impossible that Means directly opposite should have a Tendency to the self-same End, we must conclude, that Heaven is not to be attain'd to but by those who are, in some Degree, within the Limits of that Way, in which the Saints have walk'd; and that they, who in the Method of their Lives differ so far from them, as to bear no manner of Resemblance with them, pretend in vain to the happy State they enjoy.

Now of this Number are, *first*, all those who live in a State of wilful Sin; and the deeper they are engaged in it, the farther they are out of their Way to Heaven: Nor can any thing secure their Return to it but an entire Change. For *East* and *West* are not more opposite, than the Ways of these unhappy Christians are to those of the
Saints,

Saints, which, therefore, if continued, must unavoidably bring them to everlasting Perdition.

Whence it follows, *2dly*, that they, who live in the Practice of any unjust Dealing, cannot pretend to walk in the Footsteps of the Saints; since these were so far from coveting their Neighbour's Goods, that, for the most Part, they even renounced those which they might have lawfully possess'd.

Thirdly, it appears, that neither they who study to pass their Time in a Circle of worldly Pleasures, nor they who are so fill'd with the Solitudes of this Life, as to forget the Concerns of the next, bear any manner of Resemblance with the Pattern I have propos'd: For what Resemblance have Pleasures with Mortifications, gratifying Self-love with Self-denials, or a total Neglect of Salvation, with a continual studious Application to it? These are as wide from one another as Things can be, and can have no Relation to the same End, but must of Necessity terminate in very different States.

'Tis therefore beyond all Question, that nothing can render us in any measure either conformable to the Saints now, or happy with them hereafter, but a Life of *Penance*. However, that we may not be frighten'd with this Doctrine, which is expressly taught

taught both by the *Gospel* and the *Council of Trent*, nor at a Loss about the Manner how to put it in Practice, I dare confidently say, no Man will miss of his Aim in it, who will but constantly and uniformly comply, first, with *the general Duties of Christianity*; and, 2dly, with *all the particular Obligations of his respective State*. For in making good both these Parts of a Christian Life, so many Difficulties and Contradictions will occur, that it is scarce possible for any Day to pass without furnishing him with such frequent Occasions of denying himself, as will of Necessity put him into the Way of Penance.

For, *first*, it will oblige him to a faithful Observance, both of all the *Commandments of God*, and *Precepts of the Church*: And to comply with these, Nature must be frequently contradicted, and many penitential Duties perform'd by way of necessary Means; as those of *Prayer, Fasting, Reading*, frequenting the *Sacraments*, avoiding the *Occasions of Sin*, restraining the *Liberty of the Senses*, and the like.

2dly, It will over-and-above oblige him to many Duties, particularly specified in the *Gospel*; as, doing *Acts of Charity*, pardoning *Injuries*, returning *Good for Evil*, bearing patiently *all Crosses* whatsoever, and many other Duties; in the Discharge where-
of,

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of, as being very contrary to the Inclinations born with us, corrupt Nature cannot avoid being often mortified, and in a State of Violence to itself.

Lastly, it will oblige him to deprive himself of many Satisfactions inconsistent with the Discharge of the particular Duties of his State, and put him daily under more or less Restraint; which is always painful to the natural Love we have of Liberty, and the Desire of gratifying the present Humour: To say nothing of the many Oppositions a Christian will meet with from Abroad, occasion'd by the importunate Solicitations of some, and the Reflections or Raileries of others, which often prove a harder Trial to him, than all the Difficulties arising from the inward Repugnance of Temper or Inclination.

Now, from all these Instances, it plainly follows, that a *Christian* and *penitential* Life are so link'd together, that they are wholly inseparable; and that to practise *Christianity in it's full Extent* is to walk within the Limits of that Path which the Saints have chalk'd out to us, and will certainly entitle us to a Share in the Happiness they possess: For, tho' it be not by many Degrees so *narrow* as what they voluntarily chose to walk in, 'tis still the
narrow

Moral Entertainments. 15

narrow Way of the Gospel, that is, the *Way of Penance* and Self-denial, as I have shew'd.

And this will fully answer the frivolous Pretence of those who say, *they cannot lead a penitential Life, or do Penance.* I grant they cannot practise the *Solitude* of a *Paul* in the Desert, nor the *Fast*s and *Watchings* of the ancient Monks, nor the *Poverty* of a *Francis*. But there is a penitential Life of an inferiour Degree, proportion'd to every one's Strength; and this being no other, than a Christian Life, as I have described it, and consisting precisely in a faithful Discharge of all Christian Duties, with regard to every one's respective Circumstances, to pretend to be incapable of this, is pretending an Incapacity to live as a Christian ought to do. 'Tis, in effect, to throw off the sweet Yoke of the Gospel, and give up all Pretensions to Heaven. For he, who performs not the Conditions of the Covenant made with God, forfeits his Title to the Reward: And the same Causes, whatever they be, which occasion his pretended Incapacity of the one, render him unworthy of the other.

However, we are bound to thank God's infinite Goodness, with the deepest Sense of Gratitude, for having it in our Power to secure our eternal Happiness upon such
easy

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easy Terms. For tho' he had obliged us to all the most rigorous Penances, that ever have been practis'd, we ought undoubtedly to have paid a chearful Submission to his Orders; since infinite and everlasting Joys cannot but be bought cheap at any Rate whatever. But since, in Consideration of our Weakness, he requires so very little of us, comparatively to what many others have done and suffer'd for them, we cannot, without undervaluing his Goodness, reject the easy Terms demanded of us.

'Tis true, Heaven is not to be carried without *Violence* to corrupt Nature; because the very doing of our Duty, is a Violence to it. But how chearfully should we engage in this Combat, if we but reflected seriously upon the infinite Value of the Crown to be gain'd by it. Oh! if we but consider'd daily, what it is to be for ever happy with God, all our pretended Difficulties would soon vanish: But the Reason why we set so low a Price upon Heaven is, because we scarce ever consider it as we ought. We allow it perhaps some passing Glances, but the World takes up almost all our serious Thoughts: And hence it is, that our Hearts being fix'd upon this present Life, we are ready to sit down with the poor Satisfaction it offers

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us, and say, in a quite contrary Sense to St. Peter; *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

Preserve us, O God, from this fatal Blindness, and inspire us with such ardent Desires of the blessed Joys prepared in Heaven, that nothing in this World may obstruct our everlasting Possession of them.

The XXIst ENTERTAINMENT.

Of S I N.

The unhappy State of a Soul in mortal Sin.

He who loveth Sin, hateth his own Soul,
Psal. x. 6.

N Either *Death* nor *Judgment* would be terrible, were it not for Sin. Nay, Death would not have enter'd into the World, if Sin had not introduced it. 'Tis to Sin alone we owe all the Scourges wherewith God visits us in this Life. Wars, Plagues, and Famines, with their whole Train of Calamities that attend them, are but the Fruits of Sin. 'Twas Sin drove the Angels out of Heaven, and our first Parents out of Paradise. Finally, 'tis Sin alone
can

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can make us forfeit our Title to Heaven, and condemn us to eternal Flames.

This then is the Monster I am now going to describe. *Malice, Insolence, Rebellion, and Ingratitude*, are its inseparable Proprieties. Its *Malice* appears in the Mischief it does to the Soul, to which it is a mortal Poison. Its *Insolence, Rebellion, and Ingratitude*, strike at God himself, to whom it is infinitely injurious. The Mischief it does to the Soul, that is, the unhappy State of a Soul in mortal Sin, shall be the whole Subject of this Entertainment.

To represent the unhappy State of a Soul in mortal Sin, I need but compare it with the happy State from which she falls by consenting to it. For the large Distance between the two Extremes, compared together, will shew the Height to which she was elevated in the one, and the Lowness into which she is sunk in the other; in the one she will appear all beautiful, but in the other her Beauty is destroy'd, as with a noisom Leper. She is cover'd with Sores and Ulcers, and turn'd into a hideous Monster. In the one, she is not only the noblest Creature upon Earth, but enrich'd with Treasures of inestimable Value; and in the other, she becomes most vile and abject, is the Scorn of those that were her Friends, the Derision of her Enemies,

nemies, and reduced to the utmost Extremity of Poverty and Nakedness. Finally, we shall see her in her happy State of Grace, raised to be a Rival, even of Angels, *thou hast made him a very little inferior to Angels*, and in the unhappy State of Sin, sunk into the despicable Condition of brute Beasts, *He has been compared to Beasts, and is become like unto them*. Oh! what a dreadful Change, what a frightful Fall is this!

Nay her Condition is yet lower, and to be compared even with that of the infernal Spirits, allowing only for her Power of Change, which never leaves her as long as she is united to a mortal Body. For since it is a certain Truth, that the same Cause, applied to a proper Subject, must needs produce the same Effect, it follows, that as one single mortal Sin transform'd the Apostate Angels into the hideous and unfortunate Creatures they now are, so must it also transform a Soul consenting to it into the same State of Misery and Deformity: And were it as unchangeable and permanent as that of the Devils, it would be the same as theirs in the Sight of God; that is, the Object of his everlasting Hatred: Whereas now, tho' she be the Object of God's Wrath, and with Reference to her sinful State even of
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his Hatred, yet, since she has been redeem'd with the precious Blood of *Jesus Christ*, she is also an Object of Compassion to him, and capable of his Mercy, whenever she renders herself worthy of it by sincere Repentance.

This is a general Account of the unhappy State of a Soul fallen into mortal Sin; which, that it may be fully made out, and set forth so as to inspire us with an Abhorrence of so foul a Monster, I shall endeavour to expose to your View, first, all the Advantages and Treasures which a Soul possesses by her being in the State of Grace, and then the Losses she suffers, and the Miseries she is plunged into by consenting to mortal Sin. But to do this clearly, it will be requisite to you give some Idea of the Nature and Essence of *sanctifying Grace*, and all the noble Prerogatives and admirable Effects that attend it.

When therefore we say, that a Soul is in the *State of Grace*, the Meaning of it is, that she either has preserved, or recover'd the *sanctifying Grace* she received at her *Baptism*, which is call'd the *Laver of Regeneration*; because whoever is wash'd in it, receives a *second Birth*; and as he was first born of *Flesh and Blood*, so he

is

is then *re-born of God*, according to the Scripture Language.

Now this Grace which we receive in *Baptism*, or recover by *Penance*, is a *certain supernatural Quality infused by the holy Ghost into the Soul*, or a *certain heavenly Splendor*, which purifies the Soul from all Stains of Sin, and renders her acceptable to the Eyes of God. 'Tis call'd *Grace*, because it is a *gratuitous Gift*: And it is call'd *sanctifying* or *justifying* Grace, because it renders the Person to whom it is communicated *just* and *holy*. From a *Child of Wrath* and everlasting Perdition, he becomes the *adoptive Son of God*; and from a Slave of the Devil, his Soul becomes the beloved Spouse of *Jesus Christ*.

This is not all; for *sanctifying Grace* never comes unattended. At it's first Entrance into the Soul by *Baptism*, it introduces with it the three infused *Theological Virtues*, of *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*. And at it's Return by *Penance*, it revives *Faith*, which was left *dead* by Sin; strengthens *Hope*, which was left languishing and feeble; and restores *Charity*, which was banish'd from the Soul. *Charity* returning, brings back with it the whole *Treasure of Merits* acquired by our past good Works. Neither does it only recover this whole precious *Treasure* formerly laid

up

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up by Works of Piety, and forfeited by Sin, but improves it daily by each meritorious Work, whereof it is the Source or Principle.

Hence it is, that sanctifying Grace is call'd the *Life of the Soul*, because whoever is without this Grace, is without Charity; and *he who is without Charity remains in Death*, says St. *John*. So that the Soul receives proportionably the same Advantages from Grace, as the Body receives from it's Union with the Soul. And therefore, as the Body is of itself but a deform'd Lump of dead Flesh, incapable of Beauty, Strength, or Motion, but what the Soul communicates to it, so whatever Advantages of Life the Soul enjoys, as Beauty, Vigour, or Power of acting, I mean, in order to eternal Life, is all owing to sanctifying Grace.

Grace then adorning in this Manner, and enriching the Soul with these precious Jewels of *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*, the most beautiful of the three, makes her a Dwelling-place fit for God himself to honour her with his sacred Presence, according to St. *John*, who tells us, that *whoever remains in Charity, remains in God, and God in him*; so that by Grace, and Charity its inseparable Attendant, Man's Soul is consecrated, as it were, into a sumptuous Temple, where
 God

God is pleas'd to inhabit, as Christ himself in his last Sermon, saying, *whoever loveth me will keep my Word, and my Father will love him; and I and my Father will come and make our Abode with him.* And St. Paul, in his Epistle to the *Corinthians*, makes Use of this Argument to deter them from defiling their Souls with Sin, because they are *the Temple of the living God*. And this is the first Excellency or Prerogative of a Soul adorn'd with *sanctifying Grace*, and the Habits of *infused Virtues*, which attend it.

The second is, that a Person in the State of Grace, is, as I have already hinted, the *adoptive Son of God*; the most honourable Title a rational Creature is capable of. A Title so noble, that St. *Lewis of France* prefer'd it with just Reason before that of his being *Monarch* of the most flourishing Kingdom of *Europe*, and bore always a greater Respect for the Place of his *Baptism*, than that of his *Instalment* or *Coronation*. God has but one *eternal begotten Son*, to wit, *Jesus Christ*, the *second Person* of the *blessed Trinity*: and the nearest Approach a pure Creature can make to it, is that of being his *adoptive Son*.

The *Roman Emperors* (if we may be allow'd to compare great Things with
little

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little ones) when they would reward any Person of eminent Service and Merit, adopted him into the *Imperial Family*: And this was the most signal Mark of Honour and Favour they could bestow upon him. What an Honour is it then for a poor mortal Creature, and miserable Worm of the Earth, to be adopted, as I may say, into the *Divine Family* of the most adored and blessed *Trinity*! What Honour to become the adoptive Son, not of a mortal Man, who, tho' loaden with the pompous Titles of this World, is himself but Dust and Ashes, but of the great God, and King of Heaven and Earth! See, says St. John, the great Bounty of the Father towards us, in that we are call'd and are the Sons of God! He says not barely that we are call'd the Sons of God, but, to prevent our imagining it to be a meer Title without any Thing real or solid in it, he tells us, that as we bear that Name, so we *are the Sons of God*.

From this Prerogative of a Person in the State of Grace flow immediately two others, viz. his being the *Brother of Jesus Christ*, and *Coeir of his eternal Kingdom*. The first of these is expressly taught by St. Paul, who in his second Chapter to the *Hebrews* tells them, that *since he who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified,*
are

are all of the same, that is, Children of the same Father, for this Reason Christ did not disdain to call them his Brethren. And the second, *viz.* their undoubted Claim to a Partnership in the everlasting Inheritance, is declared by the same Apostle in these Words, *but if we are Sons, we are likewise Heirs; truly the Heirs of God, and Co-heirs of Jesus Christ.* Oh! what a Blessing is this, to be entitled to eternal Joys! To be the Heirs of a Kingdom that will never end! To have an undoubted Title to a Crown, of which no Treachery of Men, no Revolutions of States, no Length of Time can ever dispossess us.

This therefore is the happy Condition of a Person in the State of Grace; which I have placed before your Eyes, to let you see the Height from which he falls, and the profound Abyss of Misery into which he plunges himself, when he consents to mortal Sin. For in that very Instant he loses all the Treasures he possess'd, forfeits the Blessings he enjoyed, and is divested of all the noble Titles he was honour'd with. In the happy State of Grace, his Soul was the Darling of Heaven, the Object of God's Love, and the Joy of Saints and Angels; but in the Moment he consents to mortal Sin, he loses the Friendship of Almighty God, becomes

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the Object of his Wrath, Heaven frowns upon him, and the Saints and Angels, espousing the Quarrel of their injured Master, regard him with Disdain and Horror. He is now no longer the *adoptive Son of God*, nor *Brother of Jesus Christ*, nor *Heir of Heaven*. All these noble Titles vanish in a Moment; his Name is struck out of the Book of Life; he is degraded and disinherited by his heavenly Father; he is disown'd by *Jesus Christ*, and regarded as an Enemy and Traitor, as a Slave of the Devil, a confederate of Hell and Child of everlasting Perdition.

And what becomes now of that beautiful Temple, where God delighted to dwell? What becomes of all those precious Ornaments, those inestimable Treasures of Virtues and Merits that adorn'd and enrich'd it? Alas, as soon as Grace is expell'd, and Sin enters into its Place, there remains nothing but a frightful Scene of Desolation and Horror. Imagine the Destruction of some rich and noble City, surpris'd and plunder'd by a furious Enemy: Or, represent to your Thoughts the City of *Jerusalem*, as it is described by *Christ*, laid level with the Ground, its Inhabitants destroy'd by Fire and Sword, and, of all its lofty Palaces and Towers, not one Stone left upon another:

Repre-

Represent this, I say, to your Thoughts, and you will have some weak Idea of what happens to a Soul, when she consents to mortal Sin. For, as that unfortunate City, which is the Figure of a sinful Soul, was, as *Josephus* relates, abandon'd by its *tutelar Angels*, whose Voices were heard in the Temple to say, *let us depart from hence*; so in the Instant that Sin is accomplish'd by a full Consent of the Will, the *Holy Ghost* abandons the Temple of the Soul, as a Place polluted and prophaned, and delivers it up to become a Prey to its most cruel Enemy the Devil, who immediately enters in as an insulting Conqueror, seizes upon all its precious Ornaments, rifles all its Treasures, destroys its very Foundations, which are *sanctifying Grace* and *Charity*; and, to verify the Figure to the full, leaves not one Stone upon another, of all that noble Structure, which was the Delight of Heaven, and chosen by God himself for his Abode.

These are the Fruits of Sin; this is the *Abomination of Desolation*, which it brings into the living Temple of God; this the unhappy Change it produces in the Soul of him who consents to it. He is from that Instant dead to God, and in his Eyes no more than a loathsome Carcass; because deprived of Grace, which gave Life and Beauty to the Soul, was

the Foundation of all her Happiness, and the Source of all her Merits, which are all render'd fruitless, like a plentiful Harvest, swept away by a sudden Inundation. Tho' he had served God as many Years as old *Hilarion*; tho' he had given away all he possess'd in Alms to the Poor; tho' he had pray'd and fasted all his Life, and practis'd all the Austerities of the ancient Fathers in the Desert; finally, tho' he had heap'd up good Works upon good Works, even sufficient to entitle him to an eminent Degree of Glory in Heaven, one single mortal Sin robs him of all, cancels all, renders all void and fruitless, and reduces him to a State of Poverty and Nakedness. *The Virtues he has practis'd shall be no more remember'd*, says the prophet *Ezekiel*; his Fasts are all forgot; the Treasures of Alms, which he had laid up in Heaven, turn to no Account; his Prayers have all lost their Merit and Value: Nothing remains, nothing subsists, he is bankrupt of all, and like a broken Merchant to begin again.

Oh! how deplorable is his Condition! how inestimable are his Losses! But to comprise them all in one single Word, he has lost his God; and, if he dies in that State, he has lost him for ever; which, according to the general Doctrine of Divines,

vines, is the greatest Punishment of the Damn'd, and surpasses all their other Torments. Nay, *St. Thomas of Aquin* demonstrates that the Loss of God, even in this Life, is an Evil infinitely greater than all the Pains which Heaven and Earth can inflict upon us. Tho' God should give full Power to all Mankind to do us all the Mischief that Art and Malice can invent; tho' he should deliver us up to be tormented by evil Spirits, and suffer us to fall under the greatest Afflictions both of Body and Mind, yet our Misfortune would be infinitely less than that of a Sinner who loses God; because all other Misfortunes are but Privations of temporal Goods, but the Loss of God is the Loss of an infinite Good; and since all Losses are greater or smaller Evils in Proportion to the Value of the Goods they deprive us of, it follows that mortal Sin, by which alone we lose God, is the greatest Evil that can happen to us.

Hence it is no Wonder that *Christ*, whose Ideas of Things are infinitely just and perfect, wept over *Lazarus* and the City of *Jerusalem*, and yet refused the Tears of those pious Women, who attended on him in his Passion. For *Lazarus* was the Figure of a Soul dead in Sin, and *Jerusalem* the Type of repro-

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bate Sinners, but himself the Pattern of suffering Innocence. And therefore Christ, by weeping over them, and refusing the Tears of the holy Women, gave us to understand that there is but one Thing in this World, *viz.* Sin, which fully deserves our Tears, and that a Person labouring under the heaviest Load of Sufferings is not so great an Object of Compassion, as a Soul in mortal Sin.

Sin therefore is an Evil that justly challenges our Tears. All Sufferings of the Body, tho' never so great, are but imaginary Evils, if compared with Sin. *Job*, on the Dunghil, was a happy Man, because he was free from mortal Sin; and a Monarch on the Throne, tho' favour'd with all the Blessings, and wallowing in all the Pleasures of Life, is infinitely Unhappy, if he be in the State of mortal Sin. The Saints and Angels in Heaven, if they were capable of sensible Impressions, would weep over him; and *Jesus Christ* himself, if his State of Glory could admit of Grief and Tears, would lament his unhappy Condition. Let us then lament our Sins with such true penitential Tears, as may wash off their Stains; and be a source of Life and Grace to our Souls.

The

The XXIIId ENTERTAINMENT.

Sin consider'd as it regards a God.

*To thee alone have I sinned, and done Evil
in thy Sight. Psal. l. 5.*

IN the foregoing Discourse I have only described Sin from its Effects upon the Soul: But the Words of my Text lead me to its very Essence and Nature, which consists precisely in its being an Offence committed against the infinite Majesty of God; and tho' the Mischief it does to the Soul, be the greatest Evil that can happen to us in this World, as I have already shewn, yet this discovers but one Part of its Malice. But the Injury it does to God, in violating his holy Law, is that which constitutes its principal Deformity, and shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

To form a just Idea of the Injury we do to God by mortal Sin, we must consider with a serious Attention, what Divines and spiritual Writers teach, viz. that every mortal Sin, whether committed by Thought, Word, or Deed, is an Offence of *infinite Malice*. Neither must we understand the Word *infinite*, as it is often used by the
C. 4. Vulgar.

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Vulgar, to express any Thing that is very great ; but we must take it in its obvious and literal Meaning, and according to its full Import: Because it is not the Business of Divines to set off Christian Truths with Flourishes of Rhetorick, but to explain them simply and naturally, as they are in themselves: And therefore when they say that the Malice or Deformity of Sin is *infinite*, their Meaning is, that the Injury it does to God exceeds all Bounds and Measure; that whatever can be practised betwixt Man and Man holds no Proportion to it; finally, that it surpasses all human Comprehension: So that, tho' we should imagine the foulest and blackest Treason, Man's Heart is capable of; nay, tho' we should load it with all the most aggravating Circumstances, as of *Perjury* to a Sovereign, of *Treachery* to a Bosom-friend, of *Ingratitude* to a Benefactor, or any thing else we can think of to render it odious and detestable in the Eyes of Men; yet the Malice or Foulness of it in Relation to the Party, on whom we should suppose it practised, would bear no Proportion with that of the least mortal Sin, as it regards Almighty God: Because whatever passes betwixt Man and Man has its Bounds and Limits fix'd, and whatever is limited, cannot

not enter into Comparifon with what is infinite and unlimited.

For this Reason the *Royal Prophet* feems to make no Account of that Part of his Crime, which regards *Urias* and *Bethſhabe*, and appears fenfible only of the Injury he had done to God, to whom he addreffes himfelf in the foremention'd remarkable Words of my Text, *to thee alone have I finned, and done Evil in thy Sight.* He had certainly injured both *Urias* and *Bethſhabe* in a very heinous Manner, having murder'd the one, and drawn the other into Adultery. Nay, he had done Evil in the Eyes of Men, as well as before God: For he had given publick Scandal, and (as the Prophet *Nathan* reproach'd him) *had made the Enemies of God blaſpheme his holy Name.* But the Heinousnefs of the Injury he had done to God, both by the one and the other, outweigh'd ſo far the wrong he had done to Men, that his Repentance was wholly grounded on that Motive; as appears yet farther from his Answer to *Nathan*, who, tho' he repreſented to him in the moſt pathetick Manner poſſible, the unnatural wrong he had done his faithful Servant *Urias*, received from him no other Confefſion of his Sin, but this, *peccavi Domino, I have finned againſt the Lord.*

Sin therefore, to speak properly, is hateful in itself, precisely as it is an *Offence of God*. This constitutes its essential Deformity and Malice: And even those Sins which regard our Neighbour immediately, as *Calumny, Detraction, Murder, Adultery, Theft*, and the like, derive their whole Enormity from their Opposition to the *eternal Law* establish'd by God; and since the Majesty of God, who is injured and dishonour'd by the Violation of his holy Law, is *infinite*, hence all Divines conclude, that the Malice of Sin is also *infinite*: And this they demonstrate by this unanswerable Proof; *viz.* because as Honour takes its Degree of Value from him who pays it, so the Dishonour of an Offence or Affront is measured from the Dignity or Character of him who receives it.

This is one of those Truths that carry Self-evidence with them, and are clearest in their own Light; so that to go about to prove them, is like setting up a Candle to see the Sun by: We all know by the Light of natural Reason, that to shew a Contempt of a *Superiour*, is a greater Offence than if he were our *Equal* or *Inferiour*. That to affront a *sovereign Prince* is a more heinous Crime, than if he did the same thing to a private Man: In a Word, that it is a greater Indignity to injure and abuse a
Parent,

Parent, Friend, or Benefactor, than if he were a Person that has no Connection with us. Now, what is it that makes all this appear so evident, but the natural Notion all Men have, that the Grievousness of an Offence falls or rises according to the Dignity or Character of the Party offended; so that the greater his Dignity or Character is, the greater also in Proportion is an Offence committed against him: The Consequence whereof is, that since the Majesty of God is both *infinite* in itself, and infinitely exalted above his Creatures, the Enormity of an Offence committed against him is also infinite.

Nay, we may say, that as God is infinite, not only in his Nature and Essence, but in all his Attributes and Perfections, so there is a kind of Infinity of Malice implied, not only in Sin itself, that is, precisely as it is a *Violation of God's Law*, which is its proper Definition, but in all its Circumstances and Proprieties. So that as the *Majesty, the Goodness, Justice, Power, and Wisdom* of God are infinite, so the *Disobedience, Ingratitude, Injustice, Insolence and Folly*, which attend the Violation of his holy Law, are all Crimes, that carry with them an infinite Deformity, because each is directly opposite to some Attribute that is infinitely perfect.

Hence

Hence all Sinners are guilty of an *infinite Ingratitude*, because they offend a God, who is *infinitely Good* and Bountiful. They commit an *infinite Injustice* and *Extravagance* in transgressing the Law of a God, who is *infinitely Just and Wise*. Their *Presumption* is also infinite, in rebelling against an *infinite Power and Majesty*. In a Word, there appears something so excessively monstrous in every Circumstance of mortal Sin, as neither Thoughts can distinctly represent, nor Words express. The *Rebellion* of a poor Creature against the King of Heaven and Earth, his *Insolence*, in daring to disobey God's holy Law, his barefaced *Contempt* of him, in renouncing his Friendship for some Interest or Pleasure; finally, his *Insensibility* of so many Benefits already received, and Blessings still in Store for him, are every one, in their kind, of so black a Nature, that, tho' upon Reflection, we have a kind of confused Idea of something that is very foul and monstrous, yet we are conscious to ourselves, that not only our Ideas come infinitely short of the Thing itself, but that we even want Words to express our imperfect Ideas of it.

But to proceed now to a second Proof made use of by Divines to demonstrate this Truth : It is certain that God, who is
infinitely

infinitely *Just* and *Merciful*, and more inclined, as I may say, to Acts of *Mercy* than *Justice*, cannot demand a Satisfaction surpassing the Grievousness of an Offence committed against him. *Mercy* and *Goodness* may indeed cancel a whole Debt *gratis*, or remit a Part of it; but *Justice* can never exact more than the full Payment of it: And therefore, whatever Satisfaction God can demand, is, at the highest, but equal to the Injury he has received. Judge then of the Nature of Sin; judge of it's Malice and Enormity; judge of the Injury and Dishonour it does to God, from the Reparation or Satisfaction he has demanded, and has effectually been made for it; I mean, the Humiliations and Sufferings of *Jesus Christ*: For, as this is an Instance of the most rigid Justice that ever was practised since the Creation of the World, and surpasses infinitely all the Severities, by which God has ever manifested his Hatred to Sin, so it suffices alone to demonstrate its Foulness and Enormity.

However, that it may be rightly understood, you must not imagine, as if I laid any Stress upon, or drew any Argument from the Greatness of our Saviour's Humiliations and Sufferings, consider'd barely in themselves. They were doubtless very great, even from the Moment of his Conception,

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ception, to the last Gasps on the Cross. But how great soever they were, nay, tho' they had been far greater in themselves, and all offer'd up to satisfy the Divine Justice, yet if they had been undergon by any Person of a Rank inferior to that of *Jesus Christ*, they would have been ineffectual, nay, infinitely disproportion'd to the Satisfaction which God required. Nay, tho' the highest *Seraphin* in Heaven had offer'd himself to become Man, and suffer'd all the Torments God's Wrath could inflict upon him, yet all this had been insufficient; the whole Debt had remain'd uncanceled, and the *Hand-writing*, that appear'd against us, would have stood in its full Force.

The Reason is, because God demanded nothing less than an Equality of Justice, or *condign Satisfaction*, as Divines call it; that is, an Atonement answerable to the Injury that had been done to his infinite Majesty; or to speak more plainly, a Reparation of Honour equal to the Affront he had received by the Disobedience of our first Parents.

Now 'tis evident, that no pure Creature, tho' ever so excellent, was capable of making any such Reparation. For if any pure Creature had been capable of it, then God had been unjust in exacting infinitely more than was due to him; that is, in exacting
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acting that this Reparation should be made by no other than the Person of his *only Son*, whose Dignity being infinite, gave an infinite Value to every thing he did or suffer'd. And 'tis precisely from this, I mean the infinite Dignity of Christ's sacred Person, that we must make an Estimate of the *Price* that was paid down, and by Consequence of the *Debt* that was cancel'd by it. Every Action of *Jesus Christ* was of an infinite Value. His descending to become Man, his perfect Obedience in all Things to the Will of his Father, and offering himself to him as a Sacrifice of Expiation, were all infinite Humiliations, by which he paid to God an infinite Honour; and since the Divine Justice demanded all this of him for Reparation of the Affront he had received, it follows, that the Debt, which was owing, could not be fully discharged, nor the *Handwriting that was against us* fully cancel'd upon any other Terms; and that by Consequence, as God was *infinitely honour'd* by the Obedience and Humiliations of his Son, who was equal to him in all Things, so he had been *infinitely dishonour'd* by the Pride and Disobedience of our first Parents.

Thus we see the Malice and Enormity of mortal Sin; it is the greatest Evil that can befall the Soul, and it is infinitely in-
jurious

jurious to Almighty God. How comes it then that we detest not this infernal Monster with the greatest Hatred our Hearts are capable of! How comes it that we fly not from it, as from the Face of a venomous Serpent, that would sting us to Death! Nay, how comes it that we admit it so easily into our Hearts, and when we are so unhappy as to have yielded to it, we shew so little Concern to be deliver'd from it! It is not to be doubted indeed, but that the Corruption of Man's Nature, the Fewel of Sin we carry about us, and the Violence of Temptations, are in a great Measure the Source of this fatal Blindness: However, it is no less certain, that the Fewel of Sin would be very much weaken'd and the Violence of Temptations very much abated, if we had but a strong Faith and lively Sense of the Truths I have enlarg'd upon; because this would inspire us with such a Hatred of Sin, as would in a great Degree counter-balance our natural Proneness to it.

If then we made it our daily Practice, or at least as often as we prepare ourselves for the *Sacrament of Penance*, to reflect seriously upon the Malice and Enormity of mortal Sin, it is to be hoped, that by Degrees it would work this Effect upon us, and lay in us so deep a Foundation of Hatred and Detestation of it, as would arm us against the most violent Assaults of corrup
Nature.

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Nature: The Reason is clear; because it would form in us a strong Conviction, that Sin is the greatest Evil, that can befall us; and since all Evils, represented as such, are Objects which we cannot but hate and fear, this Conviction would insensibly make at least the same Impression upon us, and work us into an equal Hatred and Fear of Sin, as we usually have of any considerable temporal Evil, when the Idea of it is lively represented to our Thoughts. Now, if Sin were but as much fear'd and hated as those Things which all reasonable Men regard as great Evils, it is not to be doubted but Relapses, even into the most secret Sins, would become as rare as those Crimes which are attended with Infamy and Ruin in this World.

Let us suppose God had order'd Things so, that every Sin, tho' never so secretly committed, should be punish'd upon the Spot, with some very violent Pain; equal, for Example, to that of the Rack, or being burnt alive; I ask whether in that Case it be probable that any Temptation or Allurement would be strong enough to overcome us? surely no: For it appears more rational to judge, that in the Case supposed, even the most violent Temptations would be rejected with Horror; the Reason is, because the Fear of so great an Evil would

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be a powerful Counter-poise, and plead more effectually for our resisting, than corrupt Nature for our yielding to them. In like manner therefore, if we had a strong and lively Apprehension of the Evil of Sin, if we were practically convinced that it is the greatest Evil that can happen to us, as it most undoubtedly is, this would create in us so great a Fear and Detestation of it, that the Violence of Temptations, which is now the usual Apology for Relapses, would meet a Check and Counterpoise equal to that in the Case supposed, and instead of drawing us into any sinful Consent, only furnish us with an Occasion to increase our Merit.

Let us therefore consider seriously what Sin is; let us consider it over and over again, that it may make a sensible Impression upon us: Let us consider that it is the Enemy of God and our Souls; that it is a mortal Poison, which deprives us in a Moment of that Life, which ought to be most precious to us; that it robs us of the Love and Friendship of Almighty God, which is a Treasure of infinite Value; that, finally, it makes us Slaves of the Devil, and, if Death surprises us in that State, renders us eternally unhappy. And are not these most powerful Inducements to hate and detest it?

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However, let us not stop here, but from the Consideration of the dreadful Evils we fall into by consenting to mortal Sin, let us pass on to consider how grievously displeasing it is to Almighty God. Let us consider that every mortal Sin is an Offence of *infinite Malice*, because committed against an *infinite Majesty*, and that God is infinitely dishonour'd by it; let us consider that the *Apostate Angels* were doom'd to everlasting Flames for one mortal Sin; finally, that one mortal Sin excluded *Adam*, and his whole Posterity from the Kingdom of God; and that the Gates of Heaven would have been eternally shut against us, had not the *Son of God* himself become a Victim of Reconciliation, and made Attonement to God for the Injury he had received. Oh! what a dreadful Offence is that, which nothing less than the *Blood of Jesus Christ* can atone for! How immense is the Debt of Sin, for which nothing but an infinite Treasure can satisfy!

This Consideration carries the greatest Weight with it, and gives us the clearest and fullest Idea of the Enormity of mortal Sin; which therefore is the most solid Motive to ground our Repentance upon, whenever we prepare ourselves for the Sacrament of Penance: Because this Motive, if well consider'd, will inspire us with a
Hatred

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Hatred of Sin in itself; that is, precisely as it is *an Offence of God*; and whoever hates Sin, because God is offended with it, cannot but have that *filial Love* in his Heart, which is the best Pledge of his Reconciliation to him; and then our Repentance will be like that of the *Royal Prophet*, express'd in those few Words, *I have sinned against the Lord*; which was so acceptable to God, that *Nathan* was immediately inspired to pronounce his Pardon; and so effectual in itself, that we do not read it was ever follow'd by any Relapse, at least into any Sin of the same kind. If therefore our Repentance be grounded upon the same solid Motive, the Pardon of our Sins will be no less sure, and our Amendment as effectual, if by repeated Considerations we labour to work ourselves into a Hatred of Sin, equal to that of the *Royal Prophet*; whereof he has left us this authentick Declaration in his 118th Psalm, *I have hated and abominated Sin, but thy Law have I loved.*

The XXIII^d ENTERTAINMENT.

Of the Aggravations that attend Relapses into mortal Sin.

The last State of that Man is worse than the first. Luke xi. 26.

THE Parable whereof these Words are the Close, is thus set forth by St. Luke. *When the unclean Spirit is gone out of a Man, he walketh through dry Places, seeking Rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my House whence I came out; and when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnish'd. Then goeth he and taketh to him seven other Spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there, and the last State of that Man is worse than the first.*

The main Drift of this Parable is to represent two important Truths: *First*, that when a Person is deliver'd from the Bondage of Sin by *Baptism*, or the Sacrament of *Penance*, the Devil is indefatigable in seeking to replunge him into his former State; and the *second*, that the Condition of a Person thus relapsing

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is worse than it was before his former Deliverance from Sin.

There is, however, a large Difference between accidental Falls, and a constant Custom of Relapsing. The former may justly be attributed to human Weakness, but the latter deserves a much harsher Censure; for it betrays an habitual Bent of the Heart, and is usually the Fruit of a large Degree of Insensibility, attended with a supine Neglect of the Means necessary to subdue or weaken that Inclination, which is the principal Root of the Relapses I speak of.

Now 'tis of Persons under these Circumstances we must chiefly understand the Words of Christ, saying, *that their last State is worse than the first.* Which may be fully made out, *first*, from the *Aggravations* inseparable from such Relapses, and, *secondly*, from the Mischiefs a Sinner draws upon himself by a Custom of Relapsing. I shall only speak of the first in this Entertainment.

The principal Design of this Discourse is to shew that an habitual Sinner becomes more criminal, and by Consequence, more injurious to God, every Time he multiplies his Relapses, than he was when he received last the Benefit of Absolution. I mean, however, if all other Circumstances be

be equal. For it is not to be question'd, but the Sin or Sins that were the Subject of his preceeding Confession may be clog'd with such Circumstances, as far outweigh the Aggravations of a Relapse. Neither can it be doubted, but there may be Grains of Allowance for extraordinary and unforeseen Occasions, or Temptations more lasting and violent than usually. These being Circumstances, which lessen the Grievousness of any Sin, and may serve as a Counterpoise to such Aggravations, as would otherwise weigh down the Ballance, and charge it with a heavier Guilt.

I therefore speak of Persons, who, without any notable Change of Circumstances, make a Custom of returning to their Vomit, and are in a kind of a regular Tract of Confessing and Relapsing, as if they only meant to wash themselves to appear clean upon extraordinary Days, and when those are over, to wallow again in the Mire, and defile themselves as much as ever. Now of these, I say, what Christ pronounced of the Man, into whom the evil Spirit re-enter'd after he had been once chased out, *viz. that their latter State is worse than their former*, and that by every Relapse they contract a new Addition of Guilt to what they stood charg'd with before the last Pardon of their
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Sins. The Reason hereof is, *first*, because every Relapse implies a greater Contempt of God; *secondly*, because it gives a fresh Aggravation to their former *Treachery*; and *thirdly*, because it renders them guilty of a blacker *Ingratitude*. I shall speak briefly of each.

First then as to the Aggravation of *Contempt*. To make myself rightly understood, I must first shew how every mortal Sin implies a *Contempt* of God, as a general Circumstance inseparable from it. You must therefore know, that there is a *speculative* Contempt, and a *practical* one. The former is in the *Understanding* or *Judgment*; the other in the *Heart* or *Will*: And tho' the latter be usually the Effect of the former; they are not so inseparably connected, but the one may be without the other. *Speculative Contempt* is nothing else but a mean Idea conceived of any Thing or Person, and is always grounded upon some real or supposed Defect. But *practical Contempt* is an absolute and positive Determination of the Will, postponing or rejecting any thing for the Love of something else, which it prefers before it. And I call it a *practical Contempt*, because it is the immediate Result of our practical Judgment, which, deliberating and comparing, determines the Will to that Choice.

Now

Now 'tis manifest, no Christian, tho' never so completely wicked in his Practice, can ever be guilty of a speculative Contempt of God ; because, whoever but believes there is a God, must of Necessity believe him to be infinitely perfect ; and 'tis impossible to have a mean Idea of what we believe to be infinite in all Perfections, or condemn him in our speculative Judgments, in whom we cannot so much as apprehend the least Defect. Hence it comes to pass, that Libertines themselves will sometimes speak with as much Respect of Almighty God, as the most pious Christians ; and they speak but what they really think ; because their Belief is sound, and their speculative Judgment free from Error. But their Guilt consists in renouncing in *Fact*, what they believe in *Speculation*, and profess in Words. Their *Faith* is dead, and has no Influence upon their Actions. For tho' they have the Knowledge of God, yet, as *St Paul* says, *they glorify him not, but vanish away in their Thoughts*. So that notwithstanding the high and noble Ideas they have of God's infinite Perfections, which we may properly call a *speculative Esteem*, they are guilty of a *practical Contempt* of him in every Sin they commit ; because in every deliberate Sin, they effectually postpone and reject his

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Friendship for the Love of some Interest or Pleasure, which they prefer before him.

This will appear evident, if we but consider the essential Opposition *Grace* has to *Sin*, and their Inconsistency with each other. The Word of God compares them to *Light* and *Darkness*; because as these can never be join'd together in the same Subject, so neither can *Sin* and *Grace* meet in the same Soul. *Grace* destroys *Sin*, and *Sin* expells *Grace* at the very Moment it is consented to. So that upon the Proposal of any Temptation the Point in Question in Effect is this, whether the Party concern'd will resolve to prefer God's *Grace* and Friendship, or the Pleasure of the *Sin* to which he is tempted. For he cannot pretend to them both at once, but he must renounce either the one or the other. 'Tis true, it cannot be doubted but the most profligate Sinner upon Earth would rather chuse to join them both together: For no Man can become guilty of such an extravagant Contempt of God, but that he would rather have his Friendship, than be without it; if the keeping of it were to cost him nothing: but this being impossible, he must make a peremptory Choice; and either *Grace* or *Sin* must preponderate with an absolute Exclusion of the other.

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Hence it is observable, that before a mortal Sin is consented to, there passes a kind of virtual Debate within the Soul, in which the Understanding deliberates, what to prefer, and what to postpone; Conscience pleading on the one hand, and corrupt Nature soliciting on the other; till the Judgment, blinded with Passion and eager Desire of a present Satisfaction, determines the Will to prefer what it ought to reject, and reject what it ought to prefer. And does not this preposterous and extravagant Choice, made with full Knowledge and Deliberation, imply a manifest Contempt of God? Does not a Sinner, in preferring a present Satisfaction, as good as declare, that whatever God's Friendship may be worth in itself, yet for his own Part, he thinks it not worth his keeping it, with the Trouble of denying himself that Satisfaction? The Case admits of no Dispute. For there's no Argument like matter of Fact. Nor can there be a more substantial Proof of our Contempt of any thing, than our parting with it upon very easy Terms, especially when it is done with full Thought and Reflection.

This therefore is the general Circumstance of *Contempt*, imbibed in every mortal Sin. But this Circumstance, as I have undertaken to shew, is very much aggravated

in Relapses, especially if they be frequent : *First*, because to do a Thing often, shews a kind of settled Determination to it ; which, as it adds to the Lustre and Merit of Virtue, so it must needs give an Aggravation to Sin, and all the Circumstances that attend it. *2dly*, Because in all Offences of what Kind soever, even against Men, the second Transgression is always esteem'd worse than the first, and the third worse than the second, and so forward ; the latter being still worse than the former, and heightening the Quality of the Offence, as it increases the Number. Now one of the Reasons hereof doubtless is, because the repeating an Offence betrays a greater *Contempt* of the Party offended, and by Consequence, the oftner it is repeated, the more avow'd and bare-faced is the Contempt. It therefore stands with Reason, that the same Rule should hold in Reference to Almighty God, as in the Case between Man and Man. For if he who makes a Custom of affronting a Man, be reasonably supposed to have a greater Contempt of him, than he who does it but once or seldom, we cannot judge otherwise of a Sinner, who makes a kind of Practice of offending Almighty God, by renouncing his sacred Friendship, as often as the Devil, and his Passions offer him any Thing in Exchange for it.

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This made *Tertullian* say, that a Sinner, by returning to his Vomit, revokes, as it were, his former Repentance, and makes a kind of Atonement for it to the Devil. Not that he has any such Thing in his *speculative* Thoughts, but his Actions imply it, and are a Retraction, in *Fact*, whereby he now disclaims God's Friendship, dissolves the Covenant made with him, and (as the Scripture terms it) *makes a League with Hell*; by Virtue whereof, he subjects himself to the Devil, and owns him for his Lord and Master.

Hence follows the Aggravation of the second general Circumstance of Sin, *viz.* of *Treachery*, which is doubtless increased in every Relapse. The Reason is, because every Relapse is a new *Breach of Faith*; and a Breach of Faith, after many repeated Engagements to the contrary, is a Treachery of a much fouler Nature than without that Circumstance. To make this clear, I must observe to you, that the *Sacrament of Penance* is a kind of second *Baptism*: And as in Baptism we make a solemn League and Covenant with Almighty God, so when this is broke by mortal Sin, we renew it again by Virtue of the *Sacrament of Penance*. Now, in all Leagues and Covenants, there are certain *Conditions* agreed to on both Sides.

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The Conditions on the Part of God, when we make our Peace with him, are to forgive us our Sins past, and restore us to his holy Grace, with all the Advantages belonging to it. The principal Conditions on the Part of the Penitent, are to do Penance for his Sins, and offend God no more. Upon these Terms he is again received into Favour.

Whence it plainly follows, that every Reconciliation is attended with a fresh Engagement of Fidelity on the Part of the Penitent; and that as often as he has Recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, so often he renews his Covenant with God, and gives him fresh Assurances of Fidelity to him for the future. As for Instance, he who has been pardon'd twenty Times, lies under the Obligation of twenty several Contracts or Engagements; and every one of these, besides his first baptismal Vows, stands good for ever, and obliges him to a perpetual Fidelity; because they are not made for a limited Time, but for Life; nor does a Penitent promise not to sin again for a Week, Month, or Year, but never to offend God any more.

Now, from all these Premises, it manifestly follows, that every Relapse is a Breach of all the Covenants that have ever passed between Almighty God and the Sinner;

Sinner ; as being directly contrary to the Conditions stipulated, and agreed upon in every one of them, from the first to the last : And by consequence, the last Relapse cannot but imply a higher Degree of *Perfidiousness* than any of the former ; because it always is a Violation of one solemn League more than the preceeding one, and breaks at once through all the sacred Ties of Fidelity, that have ever engaged him to God, throughout the whole Course of his Life.

Thus then you see how the general Circumstance of *Treachery* is aggravated by every Relapse ; and the same must be said of that of *Ingratitude* ; which, as it is implied in every Sin, so it receives an Aggravation from every Relapse we become guilty of, especially after having obtained from God's pure Mercy, the full Discharge and Pardon of our former Sins. This is evident, because the more and greater Blessings we receive from the infinite Bounty of God, the more we are indebted to him ; and the more we are indebted to him, the more ungrateful we are in offending him. Now of all Blessings in this Life, the Pardon of our Sins is one of the highest Value ; because it delivers us from the Power and Slavery of the Devil, restores us to the Life of Grace, and puts us

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again into full Possession of the Title we had forfeited to eternal Bliss.

Oh! what Treasures are these! What inestimable Blessings! And how great then is the Bounty and Mercy that bestows them! Nothing truly can equal it in any Degree, but the Ingratitude of a Sinner, who makes a Custom of abusing the Author of it. A Subject that rebels against his Sovereign, after he has been pardoned by him, tho' but once or twice, for the same Crime, is looked upon as a Monster of Ingratitude, and detested as such by all Men of Worth and Honour. What Name then can we find to express the Ingratitude a Sinner is guilty of, who sticks not to rebel against Almighty God, after the many reiterated Pardons obtained of him, besides other numberless Blessings over and above? But tho' no Words can express the Nature of his Crime, the Comparison may at least help us to form some Idea of it; and plainly shews that, tho' the Vice of Ingratitude be one of the basest Qualities, even between Man and Man, yet the Ingratitude of a Sinner returning again to his Vomit, after he has been so often the Object of God's Mercy, has something of Foulness in it, which infinitely surpasses whatever can be practised in that Kind by one Man in relation to another.

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I shall now conclude with drawing this one Consequence from the Considerations I have enlarged upon, *viz.* that since the frequent Relapses of habitual Sinners are so extremely injurious to the Divine Majesty and Goodness, as I have justly represented them to be, it is no wonder they should often terminate, either in a *final Impenitence*, or, at the best, in a *Death-bed Repentance*, which is the last and worst Chance a Sinner can have for his Soul. That the Matter of Fact is so, is but too manifest from Experience; and, in effect, is but what the *Holy Ghost* has menaced by the Mouth of *St. Paul*, who writes thus to the *Galatians*, Chap. vii. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth in the Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption; but he that soweth in the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting.* This Doctrine of *St. Paul* is grounded upon this undoubted Maxim in Morality, *viz.* that God usually covers the Effects both of his Judgments, and Mercies, under the Operations of natural Causes. Now there is almost as natural a Connection between the Manner of Men's Lives, and their Deaths, as there is between the Nature of any *Seed*, and its *Fruit*. A long Series of good Works is the natural Seed of a happy Death; and a

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long Practice of Vice tends as naturally to an unhappy one. *Whatsoever a Man soweth, that also shall he reap.*

But tho' there were no natural Connection between them, 'tis enough, that God has promised the one as the proper Reward of Virtue, and threaten'd the other as the just Punishment of Sin. He promises incomprehensible Rewards to spur us on to Virtue, and he threatens endless Evils to deter us from Sin : And as he will most certainly make good his Promises, by crowning a good Life with a happy Death, so nothing but a groundless and insupportable Presumption can make Men flatter themselves that the Practice of Vice will terminate in the Reward of Virtue ; and that God, who is faithful to his Word, will favour those with the *Death of the Just*, who have lived the Lives and walked in the Paths of the Wicked.

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The XXIVth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Mischiefs a Sinner draws on himself by a Custom of Relapses.

And the last State of that Man is worse than the first. Luc. xi. 26.

THE Aggravations inseparable from a Custom of Relapses has been fully demonstrated in my last Discourse, wherein I have shewed plainly, that *the last State of a relapsing Sinner is worse than the first*; which, however, is not only true in relation to Almighty God, whose Displeasure he incurs more grievously than before; but also, in Relation to his own Soul, whose Evils are gradually increased by it; as will appear from the Mischiefs he draws on himself by every Relapse, as shall be shewn in this Entertainment.

The first Mischief that attends a Custom of Relapsing is a continual Uneasiness and Disquiet of Conscience. Experience suffices to convince us how great an Evil this is; I mean, to one who is not utterly harden'd in Sin: For as the greatest Blessing in this Life is an easy Mind, grounded upon a good Conscience, so there can

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be no real Happiness without it. The Repose of a good Conscience is as a *continual Feast*, and the Torment of a troubled one, labouring under the Guilt of mortal Sin, is, to the Soul, much what the Rack is to the Body. It allows her no Rest, disquiets her Night and Day, and sours all the Pleasures of Life: Nay, let a Man be otherwise never so happy, and enjoy all the Advantages of Health, Wealth, Friends, or any Thing the World can bestow upon him, he is effectually miserable under the Stings and Lashes of a bad Conscience.

The Heathens themselves were so sensible of this Truth, that they looked upon the Torment of a guilty Conscience, as one of the heaviest Punishments in this World; and therefore represented it figuratively by Things of which they had the greatest Horror, as the Gnawing of Vipers, the Haunting of frightful Spectres, the Lashes of the Furies, and the like.

Now if this be the inseparable Punishment of Sin in general, at least to a Soul not utterly lost to all Sense of God, and another World, 'tis, doubtless, much worse in the Case of Relapses; because as the Guilt is greater, so the Sting that follows it must also be sharper, and the Party concerned more disquieted and uneasy under it. And indeed, the Reasons he has to be
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uneasy under it are but too many, and too well grounded. First, the melancholy Reflection of having, for a momentary Pleasure, lost that solid Peace of Mind he enjoy'd before, frets and galls him to the very Quick: Then the Thought of having, by his last Treason and Ingratitude, provoked God's Anger more than ever, disturbs him with the Terror of his Judgments. To this is added the Confusion he is under of again confessing his Sins, which the Devil's Malice often heightens to an excessive Degree, either to throw him into some desperate Course, or at least to keep him in his Power, by the Shame of laying open the fresh Ulcer of his Soul, and imploring again the Mercy he has so lately abused.

Add to this the mortifying Thought that he is now to begin again, as having, by his Relapse, lost all the Fruit of his past Labours, and not only forfeited the Favour and Friendship of Almighty God, but the Merits of all the good Works he has ever practised, which are now cancelled, and of no more Benefit to him, than if they had never been performed. This is the general Doctrine of Divines, grounded upon the Word of God, who speaks thus by the Mouth of *Ezekiel*; *If the just Man, says he, withdraws him-*
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self from his Justice, to return to his former Iniquity, I will forget all the Good he has done. And the Wise-man says upon this Subject, What does it avail a Man, who has touch'd a dead Body, to have washed himself, if he again defiles himself, and touches it ?

These are some Reasons of that Uneasiness and Disquiet of Conscience, which a Custom of Relapsing brings with it. But I take the principal one to be, the just Ground it gives of suspecting the Validity of preceeding Confessions: For, tho' I have no Reason to think myself inclined to represent Things worse than they really are, yet I cannot, without Flattery, assure relapsing Sinners, that they need not trouble themselves about the Validity of their past Confessions, unless they can first assure me that, to the best of their Knowledge, whenever they confessed their Sins, they always resolved seriously both to avoid the Occasions of their Relapses, and use serious Endeavours to overcome the Difficulties they labour under; for whoever is not conscious to himself of ever having failed in either of these two Points, (supposing always that no Fraud has been used in his Confessions) may, notwithstanding his Relapses, be safely advised not to be over solicitous about what is past, but rather take
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care of what is to come, by often repeating the same good Purposes, and doing his best Endeavours to put them faithfully in Practice.

But if, on the contrary, any one's Conscience reproaches him, that he either has not always seriously resolved to avoid the Occasions of Sin, or has not purposed to take due Measures for the overcoming of his Habits, such an one has all the Reason in the World to be very uneasy about the Validity of his past Confessions; and to tell him otherwise, would be to flatter him into a false Security, and encourage him to go on quietly in the Way of Perdition. The Reason is plain, because *Contrition*, which is an essential Part of *Penance*, and implies a serious Purpose of Amendment, as well as a Sorrow for Sins past, is defective without the two fore-mention'd Resolutions; and the Defect of any one essential Part suffices to make the whole Confession null. I add, moreover, that when Relapsing grows into a Habit or Custom, there is generally Ground enough to suspect that some Defect in the Repentance is the real Occasion of it; and it is to be feared, that whoever is under this unhappy Circumstance, if he will but look back into the Method of his past Confessions, and examine them impartially, will, for
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the most Part, discover Defects enough to find himself under a Necessity of being as solicitous to make good what is past, as careful to avoid all Causes of the like for the future.

But there remains yet another Mischief inseparable from a Custom of Relapsing, viz. that the Habit of it, and, by consequence, the Difficulty of Amendment, is usually increased by every Relapse. Now this Increase of Difficulty proceeds from several Causes: *First*, From the withdrawing of the Divine Spirit; Who, as he pours himself liberally on those that are careful to preserve his holy Grace, enlightning their Understanding, strengthening their Wills, inflaming their Affections, and visiting them with a thousand pious Motions and Inspirations; so he withdraws himself, with all these Favours, from those who know not how to set a true Value upon this precious Treasure, but are ready to part with it for every sinful Pleasure that courts their Inclinations: From these, I say, He withdraws himself, by the same Steps and Degrees, as they depart from the Way of God's Commandments; and forbears communicating these extraordinary Lights and special Graces, without which the ordinary ones are, for the most Part, render'd fruitless through the Corruption.

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of their Hearts, caused by the strong Inclination to Sin on the one hand, and the Habit they have contracted of resisting God's Inspirations on the other.

Whence follows, of Course, the second Cause, that increases the Difficulty of their Return to God ; to wit, the new Addition of Power the Devil gets over them by every Sin they relapse into: For since every Act of mortal Sin banishes God from the Soul, and puts the Devil in Possession of it ; because there is no Middle or Vacancy in the Soul, but either *God* or *Satan* must be Master of it ; it follows, that the Frequency of such Acts, as it sets a Sinner at a greater Distance from God, and the Influences of his holy Grace, so at the same Time it gives the Devil an Opportunity to fortify himself more strongly ; the Consequence whereof can be no other, than the increasing still more and more the Difficulty of his Return to God. And since one Relapse naturally draws on another, the frequent multiplying of them cannot but at length establish the Dominion of the Devil over him, in such a Manner, that it will become at length the Work of nothing less than a very extraordinary Grace to rescue him out of his Power.

This leads me to a third Cause, that renders the Recovery of a relapsing Sin-

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ner still more and more difficult ; to wit, the natural Increase and Growth of Habits by a Frequency of their Acts. This is evident from Experience, even in the Progress of virtuous Habits, or such as are indifferent in themselves ; for the oftner we repeat their Acts, the deeper they take Root ; and there is no Way of attaining to a Proficiency in any of them but by Practice, that is, a frequent Repetition of their proper Acts. But vicious Habits have a great Advantage over these, and are of a much quicker Growth ; because corrupt Nature is, as it were, their proper and natural Soil : They are like Weeds that grow wild, and come up of themselves ; nay, there even needs a great deal of Care and Pains to destroy them : But if, instead of this, we also cultivate and cherish them, if the Soil be improved and prepared for them over and above, we may easily guess how quick they will grow upon us.

However, thus far is certain, that every time we yield to any vicious Habit, we become proner to yield to it again ; we make Nature more pliable to all its Impressions ; we give a new Strength to it, and make it sink deeper than before. Our Passions are like a head-strong Mob, the more we gratify them in their unreasonable

sonable Demands, the more we encourage them to rebel ; and the only Way to bring them to Terms of Reason, is to keep them under a severe Discipline. Was there ever any Man subject to the Tyranny of any Passion, but must own, that the Beginning of his Misfortune was dated from the first Time he yielded to it ? And that the gradual Increase of its Power over him was also wholly owing to the very same Cause ; which, as often as it was repeated, still produced the same Effect, and gave a new Addition of Strength to the growing Evil ? Must he not own, that whenever he indulged that Passion, he found it more rebellious afterwards ? And when he flatter'd himself he would but gratify it for the present, he only set it a craving more eagerly, and cut out Work for a more difficult Combat than before ?

'Tis therefore evident, that the Tyranny of Sin increases with Sinning, and that the oftner we yield, the more we desire to yield, and become less able to resist : Nay, we may yield so long, till it becomes in a Manner natural, and our Power of resisting so weak, that we are scarce sensible that we have any. I should be afraid to say this, had I not St. *Austin's* Authority for it, whose Words upon this Subject are quoted by every Body. *Ex voluntate perversa fac-*

ta est libido, & dum servitur libidini facta est consuetudo; & dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est Necessitas. Here we have all the principal Steps and Degrees of a growing Habit, described by this Saint. His Words may be english'd thus, *The Will not govern'd, turns to an eager desire of Sin, and by our gratifying this Desire it is formed into a Habit, and a Habit not resisted becomes a Necessity.* St. Isidore expresses the same in these Terms, *Actio consuetudinem parit, consuetudo necessitatem, necessitas mortem.* That is to say, *Acts produce a Habit, a Habit begets a Necessity, and Necessity terminates in Death,* meaning the eternal Death of the Soul.

'Tis true, I cannot but think that both these Fathers are to be understood in a qualified Sense, and not of an *absolute* and *irresistible Necessity*. For, where there is no Power to resist, there can be no Liberty, and without Liberty there is no Sin, because Sin is a *free and voluntary Transgression* against the Law of God. However, their Words import so violent a Bent and Proneness of Nature, as seems to approach very near to an irresistible Necessity in all its *Effects*. And this is what the Scripture calls the *Servitude* or *Slavery* of Sin. Because, as a Slave is at his Master's Beck, to obey all his Orders, though never so extravagant,

travagant, so a Person, under these unhappy Circumstances, is so perfectly subject to the Tyranny of his prevailing Passion, that he scarce knows what it is to resist, and seems rather hurried on, or thrust forward like an Engine, than to act freely, when Objects, which are agreeable to that Inclination, and accustom'd to prevail upon it, present themselves.

Oh! how dangerous and deplorable is the State of a Sinner reduced to such a Servitude! 'Tis true, his Condition is not desperate, because, as St. *Austin* says, *no Wound is incurable to an Omnipotent Physician*; and as long as there is Life, there is Hope. Nay, he is bound to do all he can to work himself out of it; particularly, by an humble and hearty Prayer, by reading pious Books, mortifying his Senses, and avoiding all Occasions of the Sin he is inclined to. However, we cannot but consider him as one reduced to a most dangerous State. And therefore, since every Sin we commit, brings us still nearer and nearer to this unhappy State, because, by every Sin the Power of Sin is encreased, and the Power of resisting is diminished; it follows evidently, that by every Relapse, the Recovery of a Sinner becomes more difficult than it was before, and that the oftener he falls, the harder it is for him to rise again. And so his Difficulties

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ficulties go on increasing, till by multiplying Relapses, he brings himself to the Condition I have described, which, as St. *Isidore* tells us, usually *terminates in Death*, by closing all up with the last Fruits of Sin in this Life. I mean, *Despair*, and *final Im-penitence*.

Thus we see the Nature and dangerous Consequences of Relapses; that is, the Injury they do to God on the one hand, and the Mischiefs they bring with them on the other. In my last Discourse, I laid before you the bare-faced *Contempt* of God, the *Treachery* and *Ingratitude* which those, who continue in the Practice of them are guilty of: But since it usually happens, that Persons accustomed to Sin, are but little affected with Considerations of this Nature, Self-Interest ought at least to open their Eyes, and make them sensible of the unhappy State they live in: For what Content or Satisfaction can they enjoy? What Ease can they have under the Weight and continual Reproaches of a guilty Conscience? Are not their very Pleasures imbitter'd by it? Have they any Thing to comfort them in their Afflictions? Then again, what Fears and Agonies do they suffer? Are they not disturbed with every Danger that threatens them? Nay, often with the mere Imagination of it? Is not the very Thought
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of Death as bitter almost as Death itself, with the Apprehension of their being surpris'd by it, in a State in which they know themselves wholly unprovided for it ?

These certainly are the usual Attendants, this is the daily Portion of a guilty Conscience. And truly, nothing is a greater Evidence of the Power of Sin, than that all the Miseries it makes Men suffer even in this Life, are not sufficient to move them to a generous Resolution to throw off its Yoke. But will they not consider that the longer they continue subject to it, the more they increase their Slavery ? Will they not consider, that every Sin they commit, is the Addition of a new and stronger Link to the Chain that holds them in Bondage ; and that by adding Sin to Sin, they may at length strengthen their Fetters to such a Degree, as to put it in a great Measure out of their Power to break loose from them ?

I say, *in a great Measure*, to express the Difficulty of it. For tho' it be true, that a Sinner cannot absolutely lose the Power of returning to God, during the Course of this Life ; yet this Power may, by a long Custom of Sinning, be so cramp'd and weaken'd, and his vicious Habits so strengthen'd, that, without an extraordinary Grace to enable him, which he has no Reason

Reason to presume upon, he will never have the Courage and Resolution to break through all the Difficulties into which he has thrown himself; and Experience will too late convince him, that it is much easier to conquer a Passion in the Beginning, than even to struggle heartily with it, when it is once fortified by Habit and Custom. I only wish the Experiment may never be tried; and conclude with our Saviour's Advice to the Cripple cured by him. *Sin now no more, lest something worse befall thee.*

The XXVth ENTERTAINMENT.

Of Venial SIN.

He who contemneth little Things, shall fall by Degrees. Eccl. xix. 1.

HAVING in the foregoing Discourses set forth the Enormity of mortal Sin, and the Danger of frequent Relapses into it; the Order of my Subject now calls upon me to propose some general Means to prevent this Evil. The first of these, and which appears the most natural, is to be solicitous to avoid, not only mortal Sin itself,

itself, but every Thing that borders upon it, and the very remotest Steps towards it. For, as the greatest Virtue is sometimes owing for its first Rise and Progress to very small Beginnings, so is it also with Vice. Hence one false Step in the Beginning, has often drawn after it a long Train of sinful Disorders, and the blackest Crimes may be usher'd in by the smallest Failings. Nay, the natural Course of Things seems to require that it should be so. For Vice has its Degrees to pass through as well as Virtue; the Soul must be prepared, before she can familiarize herself with it; and 'tis as unnatural for a Man to fall from Virtue to the Depth of Vice, as it is for Water that is boiling hot, to pass to the greatest Degree of Coldness, without being first luke-warm.

For this Reason, as there is no Degree of Virtue so small, but ought to be cultivated and cherish'd, because it may be gradually improved; so is there no Sin so inconsiderable, but what we ought to be jealous of, and carefully put a Stop to in the Beginning; because if it be neglected, it may prove to be of dangerous Consequence; and become the Seed of mortal Sin: For how small soever it may seem in itself, it prepares the Way for greater ones, and opens a Breach for the Devil to enter at, and make himself Master of the Soul, as

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we are expressly forewarn'd by the Holy Ghost, assuring us, that *he who contemneth little Things, shall fall by Degrees.* And by Christ also, who tells us, *that whoever is unfaithful in small Things, is also unfaithful in great ones.*

You plainly see, I speak not of the Danger of barely committing, but of *contemning*, or *neglecting* venial Sins. For there is a large Difference between these two ; because to be surpris'd into them, is an Effect of human Weakness, even in the most pious Christians ; but to *contemn* them, is not only to commit them with full Knowledge and Deliberation, but to multiply them one after another, without any farther Care or Concern to atone for them, or give a Check to their Growth by a speedy Repentance. Now this Contempt or Neglect of venial Sins, is so great a Disposition to Mortal, that whoever is guilty of the one, seldom stops long without falling into the other, as I shall endeavour to shew in this Entertainment.

The first Reason why a Contempt of venial Sin disposes to Mortal, is grounded upon the natural Connection the one has with the other. This Reason comprehends not all venial Sins with Relation to mortal Sins in general, but only such venial and mortal Sins, as are within the same Species,
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or proceed from the same Root, and only differ in their several respective Degrees. Now the Connection between these venial and mortal Sins is such, that he who makes little Account of the one, will not long avoid being drawn or surpris'd into the other. For, 'tis with the Distempers of the Soul, as with those of the Body : Many have paid dear for having neglected a slight Indisposition ; which, if Care had been taken at first, would have gone off without farther Consequence ; but being neglected, brought them at last to their Grave. The Scratch of a Pin is but a trivial Wound, yet if you let it fester, or turn to a Gangrene, it may cost you your Life. In like manner, tho' a venial be but a slight Indisposition, or a small Wound of the Soul, as I may call it ; yet, if through Want of timely Care, you prevent not its Growth, it may easily become mortal, and deprive you of your spiritual Life.

Thus he that accustoms himself to pilfering Thefts, will not be long before he becomes guilty of great ones. Thus it also often comes to pass, that the first Motions of Anger or Impatience, if not check'd immediately, break out soon after into a violent Storm, and many Times into Murmurs and Blasphemies against God. Thus again, a customary Neglect or Coldness in

our Devotions, paves the Way to Libertinism. Thus finally, a small Misunderstanding, not immediately made up, fours upon the Heart, and turns into implacable Rancor; a light Suspicion deliberately entertain'd, is by Degrees improved into a consummate rash Judgment; an immoderate Liberty in discoursing of our Neighbour's Imperfections, draws on insensibly downright Detracting; an indiscreet Familiarity smoothes the Way to criminal Immoralities; and so forth, in innumerable other Cases, in which, venial Sins have so great an Affinity with Mortal, that they are but, as it were, an easy Step to it: Nor would this foul Guest be able to get Admittance into the Heart, were it not introduced by Failings of a less frightful Aspect.

This leads me to a short Digression, relating to the *immediate Occasions* of mortal Sin, which all are indispensably bound to shun. By *immediate Occasions*, I mean those which seldom or never fail of being followed by, and are but, as it were, one single Remove from the mortal Sin, to which they dispose either of their own Nature, or by Reason of the peculiar Weakness of a Temper easily wrought upon. All then, I say, are bound in Conscience to shun Occasions of this Nature, to the utmost of their Power. The Reason where-
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of is manifest, because their Connection with mortal Sin is so great, that whoever loves the one, cannot reasonably be supposed to hate the other ; as he who will needs be handling Pitch, when he can avoid it, may be presumed to be no Friend to Cleanliness. So that the Danger here threatens not barely at a Distance, as in the venial Sins I have hitherto spoken of, but brings immediate Death to the Soul, and verifies the saying of *Salomon*, that *he who loves Danger shall perish in it*. Whence it plainly follows, that whoever is concerned in any Occasion of this Nature, and approaches the sacred Tribunal without a firm Purpose to separate himself from it, is guilty of Sacrilege ; his Confession being a meer Mockery, and serving only to render him more criminal, instead of reconciling him to God ; since his Heart keeps a secret Correspondence with his Enemy, tho' his Tongue makes never so many Protestations to the contrary.

But to return to the Point in Question ; the *second* Reason why a Contempt of venial Sin disposes to mortal, is, because committing them frequently (I mean with Deliberation) makes Sinning grow familiar to us ; it accustoms us to have a kind of Disregard to God's holy Law, and hardens us insensibly against the *Fear* of Transgressing ; which, being one of the strongest Fences

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against Sin, when this Fence is broke down, a free Passage is opened for all sorts of Sins to enter in upon us.

The Force of this Reason will appear the better, if we consider that the first and chief Care of those, who are charged with the Education of Children, is to ground them well in the *Fear of God*, and inspire them with a great Horror of Sin; this being the most solid Foundation of Virtue, and best Security against Vice. Now, when a Person is thus principled, and the Fear of God has taken deep Root in the Soul; the first Proposal of a mortal Sin, is apt to startle him as much, as if you should shew him a deep Precipice, and bid him throw himself headlong into it. The very Thought of it affects him with Horror, and serves only to alarm him into a Watchfulness and Concern answerable to the Greatness of the Danger that threatens him.

Nor is the Devil ignorant of this great Secret. He is too great a Master in the Mystery of Iniquity, and Art of training Souls up to it, not to know that to push them all at once to the Brink of the Precipice, or tempt them to mortal Sin at the very first Suggestion, is so far from promoting, that it is the direct Way to obstruct and frustrate his malicious Designs: He knows, the Net must be spread at a Distance,

Distance, and the Danger kept out of Sight: He knows, a tender Conscience must be nicely managed, and wean'd by Degrees from the Shame and Fear of Sin, in which it was nursed, before it can be work'd up to a pitch of Boldness, to venture upon Offending God mortally: And, the only sure Way he has to effect this, is, to lead Men on gently, from Step to Step, from one Degree of Sin to another, till he brings them at last so far, as to make little or no Account of deliberate venial Sins. For, when this Difficulty is once well got over, when offending God with full Deliberation, tho' but in small Things, is once become familiar and easy, 'tis manifest, the Devil has then got over a very considerable Part of his Work; because, by this Means, the greatest Obstacle to mortal Sin, I mean, the *Fear of God*, and a certain Tenderness of Conscience, are then, though not wholly taken away, at least removed in a very great Measure: And, what remains to be done, is little more than leading an Enemy against a Town, already well disposed, and prepared to receive him. And therefore, the Devil chooses mostly this slow and gradual Method of corrupting innocent Souls, and bringing them under the Yoke and Slavery of Sin: A long Experience having sufficiently evidenced the infallible

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Truth of this Divine Oracle; viz. that *he who contemns little Things, shall fall by Degrees.*

To explain myself by some familiar Instance; when, for Example, he intends to draw a Person from his ordinary Duties or Devotions, in order to draw him insensibly into an irregular Course of Life, the first Step he makes, is to bring him to a negligent Performance of them: His next Endeavour is to prevail, at least so far upon him, as to make him put them off to some unusual or unreasonable Hour: He proposes not as yet an absolute Omission of them, because he finds him not yet disposed to swallow this Bait: Besides, he knows the absolute Omitting of certain Duties is but a natural and easy Sequel to our putting them off from Time to Time, and will soon follow of Course. Some Hindrance, for Example, wholly unforeseen, intervenes at the Time design'd: The Party finds himself engaged in Company, which he cannot well leave: 'Tis true, he has at first some Squeamishness of Conscience to omit them; but it cannot be helped: Necessity has no Law. This happens several Times. The Scruple he had at first wears off by Degrees; he begins to be habituated to it; at length, whether any Hindrance happens or not, he wholly lays aside the Devotions.

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he formerly used to Practice. The Omitting of one, draws on-insensibly the Omitting of another; because the Ground of it, which is, a Tenderneſs of Conſcience, and a Zeal for the Service of God, is weaken'd by it: And thus he falls, not all at once, but by certain eaſy Steps and Degrees, into a negligent and ſlothful Courſe of Life, which, as Experience convinces, ſeldom fails to baniſh from the Heart the Fear of God, and engage Perſons in irregular Ways, the uſual Conſequence whereof, are Habits of mortal Sin. So that you ſee, a ſmall Neglect, not corrected in Time, proves often to be the firſt Link of a long Chain of Sins, which at laſt drag the Soul to everlaſting Perdition.

Nay, we may confidently ſay of Perſons, that have been virtuoſly educated in their Youth, and early grounded in the Fear of God; that the Devil, with all his Power and Malice, would never be able to ſaſten conſiderably upon them, did he not get his firſt Hold by Sins, which, in Appearance, are inconfiderable, and of no Conſequence; whereas Thouſands of this Sort, have been drawn into the moſt ſcandalous and wicked Courſes, by the very Steps I have marked out. How many have turned mere Sots, who at firſt deſtoted the Vice of Drunkenneſs, and even

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had a natural Aversion to it ; but engaging themselves unwarily in Company, were drawn in by Degrees from Sipping to Drinking, and from smaller Excesses to greater, till having served this sort of Apprenticeship, as I may call it, for some Time, they became at last complete Masters of the Trade, and not only followed it themselves, but helped to train up others to it ? How many, again, have, only by beginning with Mock-oaths, run insensibly into the Vice of Cursing and Swearing, tho', at their first Coming into the World, they had the greatest Hatred to it ? Finally, how many innocent Souls have been trappann'd this Way into all the Extravagancies of a disorderly Life, who, at first, would have sooner thrown themselves into the Jaws of a Bear, or Lion, than consented to the Sins they afterwards committed without Blushing or Remorse ?

Nay, do we not see daily Examples of this Nature ? A young Man enters into the World with Inclinations to Virtue, and Principles of Religion to support it ; but being now Master of a plentiful Fortune, the Devil puts it into his Head, that Devotion is not a Gentleman-like Virtue ; that regular Hours are only fit for Colleges and Cloisters ; and that to be advised by Friends, or Parents, is to be treated like a Child,

a Child, and kept under Tutelage. Here is yet no Proposal of any Vice: The Devil is only busy in disarming his Virtue, and he certainly takes the fittest Time to succeed in his malicious Design; because a young Man never stands more in Need of keeping up these Fences, I mean, *Devotion, Regularity, and a docile Temper*, to preserve the good Fruits of his Education, than at the critical Time of his first Entrance into the World; it being evident, from Experience, that the Measures a Person takes at that Time, determine usually his Fate for ever after, and have a considerable Influence upon his Happiness or Unhappiness, both in this World, and the next. So that if he begins then to lay aside the Practice of a regular and uniform Devotion; if he lives by Chance and Humour, instead of Rule and Method; if he withdraws himself from the Direction and charitable Advice of Friends, for fear of incommoding his Inclinations; we may readily pronounce upon him, that he is in a dangerous Way; and tho' he be not yet guilty of criminal Excesses, they will soon follow; the Fences are already broke down, the Passage is clear, and the World and Flesh may enter in at Leisure.

Hence it is, that as the Devil has, by long Experience, found this gradual Method

that of corrupting innocent Souls to be the most successful, so he certainly inspires those Ministers of Iniquity, who serve under him in this wicked Trade, to employ the same Artifices in pursuing their Designs. What Man has ever had the Impudence to make a bare-faced criminal Proposal to a virtuous Woman at the first Interview? He knows it will be rejected with Horror and Indignation, unless she can first be prevailed upon to lay aside some Part at least, of that modest Behaviour, which is the best Guard as well as Ornament of her Sex, and keeps Men in Respect: For as long as she keeps up to the nice Rules of Modesty, and neither encourages nor suffers any of those Liberties or Addresses, by which ill-designing Men commonly lay their Snares at a Distance, her Virtue is as safe as a Citadel, to which no Army can make its Approaches. But if those Freedoms be tolerated, or allowed of, her Virtue may be in Danger; since Libertines, who have no other Aim than to corrupt it, will be encouraged by it to redouble their Endeavours to draw her insensibly into a more criminal Compliance.

Wherefore, to conclude this Discourse, it highly concerns all those, whom God has hitherto preserved from Vice, to take timely Warning by the Falls of so many other
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other miserable Souls, who stood once as fair for Heaven as themselves, and might have easily maintained their Ground, had they but been careful not to give the Devil an Advantage over them, by putting themselves within his Reach, when they ought to have kept him at a Distance, which would have certainly secured them against his Temptations: For the Condition of Man's Soul in this World, is much the same with that of a Town besieged by an Enemy: As long as the Enemy is bravely repulsed from the Out-works, a Town is in no Danger of being taken; but when he has once lodged himself in the Ditch, or Counter-scarp, the Town itself will soon be forced to surrender. Just so it is with Man's Soul; as long as we keep the Devil at a Distance, and by *Watchfulness* and *Affiduity in Prayer*, which are, as it were, the Out-works that cover us against him, we hinder him from gaining Ground; or approaching near us; we are out of Danger of being overcome by him. But if we once let him make himself Master of these Out-works, tho' we seemingly resolve to stop him there, we shall soon find ourselves deceived, and experience, to our own sad Cost, that it is much easier to keep our Enemy quite out, than dislodge him, when he has once got Footing. So
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that the true Secret to avoid mortal Sin, is to be tender of committing any wilful venial one, and not to slight them because they are little; *for he who contemns little Things, shall fall by Degrees.*

The XXVIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The same Subject continued.

He that is unfaithful in a small Thing, is also unfaithful in a greater. Luke xvi. 10.

BESIDES the two Reasons already given, that venial Sins dispose to mortal, there is a third of great Weight, *viz.* the *Diminution of Grace*, caused by every wilful and deliberate venial Sin; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

That every wilful and deliberate venial Sin causes a Diminution of *Charity*, and by Consequence of *Grace*, is the Doctrine of all spiritual Writers; who, as they all agree that no Collection or Number of venial Sins, how great soever, can of itself utterly extinguish *Charity*; so are they no less unanimous in assuring us, that every deli-

deliberate venial Sin *cools its Fervour* in some Degree, weakens the Power of Grace, and renders the Souls less vigorous and active in resisting the Assaults of corrupt Nature: All which facilitates of Course the Way to mortal Sin, and disposes the Will to it in the same Degree or Measure as it takes away from the Strength that is to oppose it.

To give you a clear Knowledge of this Truth, it will be necessary to explain the Principle on which it is grounded. You must therefore observe, that in every Person, justified by *Baptism*, or the Sacrament of *Penance*, there are two opposite Roots, *viz. Grace* and *corrupt Nature*. St. *Austin* calls them *Charity* and *Concupiscence*; because they only differ from *Grace* and *corrupt Nature*, as natural Proprieties from the Essence they flow from: For as *Charity* flows immediately from *habitual Grace*, and is inseparably connected with it, so is *Concupiscence* no less the immediate Effect and inseparable Attendant of *corrupt Nature*. *Charity*, as it is here taken by St. *Austin*, is the Love of God above all Things; and by *Concupiscence* is meant its opposite Love, *viz. Self-love*, or the irregular Love of ourselves, or of any Creature in order to ourselves.

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Now all deliberate Actions or Desires (I mean such as are either *sinful* or *meritorious*) have their growth from one of these two Roots. *Charity* is the Root of all meritorious, and *Concupiscence* the Source of all sinful Actions and Desires: And these two opposite Roots or Qualities act upon each other in the Soul, much after the same Manner as two contrary Humours do in the Body. They are always in dispute and strife about the Mastery over the Heart, and whatever side prevails, it either destroys or subdues, or at least weakens the other in some Degree; but with this Difference, that *Charity*, which is the Effect of *habitual Grace*, may not only be weakened, but utterly extinguish'd and destroy'd by the prevailing Power of *Concupiscence*; whereas *Concupiscence*, tho' it may be mortified and subdued, can never be wholly exterminated in this mortal Life. And the Reason of this Difference is, because *Charity* goes and comes of Course with *habitual Grace*, from whence it flows; which being a free Gift of God, is wholly foreign to our Nature, and no Part of our own Stock; and tho' of itself it be a subsisting and permanent Quality, and very different from those *passing Graces*, which move us to Action, yet it may easily be lost, and is effectually forfeited

seited by every Act of the Will consenting to mortal Sin. But *Concupiscence* is born and bred within us, and so closely interwoven with our Nature, that tho' *Grace* may restrain it, and tie it up from doing us Mischief, nothing but Death can destroy it.

However, it plainly follows hence, that both *Charity* and *Concupiscence* have their several Degrees of Encrease and Abatement, which ever rise or fall in Proportion, as *Charity* is more or less vigorous and active in combating against the Inclinations of corrupt Nature. When *Charity* exerts itself vigorously in opposing the irregular Desires of *Concupiscence*, it gets ground at every Step; because by every Act it produces or commands, (as Divines speak) it merits an Increase of Grace; whereby it becomes still more active, and better able to resist the Assaults of its Enemy. But when *Charity* grows languid and unactive, it runs insensibly to Decay, which, if timely Care be not taken to prevent it, must unavoidably terminate in its utter Destruction; because *Concupiscence*, which never lies idle, gets ground in the mean Time; and 'tis the Nature of this restless Evil, never to leave off pursuing its Course, till it becomes absolute Mistress of the Heart, which must unavoidably follow,

low, sooner or later; if *Grace* and *Charity*, which alone can restrain it, continue to lose Ground by our frequently gratifying corrupt Nature, tho' but in small Things: For tho' the *Love of God* be not thus destroy'd all at once; yet like a Body labouring under a lingering Distemper, or a Decay of its vital Spirits, it falls away insensibly, till it becomes at last so weak and feeble, that we may give it for lost, at the first violent Temptation that assaults it. And thus it is, that by a gradual Diminution of *Charity*, or the *Love of God*, caused by repeated venial Sins, *Passion* becomes at length too strong for *Reason*, the *Flesh* triumphs over the *Spirit*, and *Charity* is destroy'd by *Concupiscence*, the Effect whereof is the Death of the Soul.

'Tis true, this Way of destroying the Life of the Soul is not so quick, as when it is done at one mortal Blow; but it is no less sure; and the Mischief the Soul receives, is in effect the same, whether she be starved out by Degrees, or overcome by one brisk Assault. This seems exactly conformable to St. *Austin's* Doctrine in his 118th Epistle, where he compares venial Sins to Drops of Water, which, by their Number, sink at length a Ship. His Words are these? *If a Ship be lost, what Matter is it whether she be swallowed all at once, or gradually*

dually sunk by many Drops of Water entring at a Leak, and neglected to be pumpt out? For if the Devil can but rob us of God's Grace, it equally serves his Turn, whether he rifles us all at once, or by small Parcels. Nay, as a modern Author observes ingeniously, the smallest Sins are often the greatest Stratagems; because we are but seldom upon our Guard against them, neither are we much affected with the Mischief they do us. We regard them as inconsiderable Evils, not reflecting that their Poison, tho' it be not mortal in itself, may prove so in its Consequence.

Nay, to Persons strongly inclined to Sin, 'tis morally impossible it should be otherwise, because every deliberate venial Sin they commit, is still a Weakening of their spiritual Strength, and deprives them of some Part of that Portion of Grace, which should support them in the Day of Battle. Who is there that ever fell into mortal Sin, but if he looks back, and traces his Misfortune to its Source, will find that his Neglect of lesser Failings was the first Step to it? *The greatest Crimes*, says St. Bernard, *have their Beginning from the smallest Sins; for no Man becomes completely wicked on a sudden.* 'Tis always either some Neglect of Duty, or Coldness in our Devotions, or Want of Guard upon our Senses,

Senses, or some immoderate Dissipation of the Mind, or Vanity of the Heart, that gives the first Occasion to the greatest Falls. For tho' these seem to be all Trespasses of little or no Consequence, and would be so in Reality, if Care were immediately taken to apply their proper Remedies, and hinder the Poison from spreading farther; yet when on the contrary they are neglected; when we make little Account of them, and take no Care to put a Stop to their farther Progress, the Case is quite otherwise. For then every venial Sin we commit, helps to embezzle some Part of our Stock of Grace, which is the Strength of our Souls, and renders us less able to resist the Power of *Concupiscence*. Every venial Sin lays us then more and more open, and widens the Breach for our Enemy to enter at, who, we may be sure, neglects not to take us at this Disadvantage, and improve the Opportunity we give him, by thus weakening and disarming ourselves, so that tho' venial Sins cannot of themselves cause the Death of the Soul, yet they are always a remote Disposition to it; and, if neglected and multiplied, waste our spiritual Strength, and dispirit our Souls to such a Degree, that under this weak and languishing Condition, it becomes very difficult to preserve the Life of Grace for any long Time.

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I shall now conclude, with some Directions particularly proper for those, who are already engaged in any Habit of mortal Sin: For the very same Method, which, if it had been used in due Time, would have preserved them from falling into that unhappy State, is now the only effectual Expedient to draw them out of it. They fell into it by Degrees: For no Man plunges himself into Vice all at once. Many repeated Falls, and those usually occasioned by the same previous Failings, brought them into the Habit of Sinning; and they have no other Way left to get out of it, than by carefully avoiding those very Occasions and lesser Failings, which were the preparatory Steps, as well to their first Fall, as the following ones, which became the Links of that Chain, which has fetter'd them up, and holds them in the Bondage of Sin. For, though the Relapses of habitual Sinners come usually on much quicker than their first Fall, and as the Habit gets Strength, return quicker upon them, yet they are always gradual in some Measure, and usher'd in by Sins of a lesser Note, the avoiding of which is the only Thing that will certainly secure them.

First then, it behoves them to use their utmost Endeavour to avoid all wilful and deliberate venial Sins of what Kind soever,
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though they seem to have no natural Connection with the mortal Sin, to which they are inclined ; whereof I have already given the Reason, to wit, because every venial Sin, of what Kind soever it be, causing a Diminution of Grace, is by Consequence a weakening of that spiritual Strength, which their great Weakness and Proneness to Sin stands highly in Need of, to support them against the Temptations of the Devil.

Whence it also follows, that any wilful Neglect or Omission of their usual Devotions, may be of ill Consequence to them ; because Prayer being one of the principal Means to obtain God's Grace, which alone can support them, a Neglect of it must needs deprive them, at least in some Part, of this necessary and powerful Succour. And tho' the casual Omission of the Duty of Prayer may be no great Matter in itself, it is so to one that stands in need of a special and extraordinary Grace to keep him from falling ; and this is chiefly to be obtained by an extraordinary Exactness in every Duty, since our Saviour has declared, that *he who is faithful in small Things, shall be so in great ones* ; because his constant Fidelity in small Things, will be rewarded with so plentiful a Succour from Heaven, as will strengthen him, even
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against the most violent Assaults of his Enemy.

Now, if it be so necessary for the Recovery of an habitual Sinner, to avoid even such wilful and deliberate venial Sins, as have no natural Connection with the prevailing Habit, it concerns him certainly much more to avoid all such, as either of themselves, or with regard to his particular Temper, have a considerable Connection with, and are usually the remote Steps to the Sin it inclines him to. I need not explain myself any farther, nor specify Particulars ; for whoever is engaged in any Habit of Sin, cannot but know, by fatal Experience, what are the immediate, and what the remote Occasions of it ; what Objects are most apt to inflame the Dis-temper ; and finally, what it is that usually lets in Temptations upon him, or heightens them to a Pitch that carries Danger with it.

This, I say, every one, in the Circumstances supposed, cannot but know by his own Experience ; which, therefore, is to direct him in what he is to do, or rather in what he is to avoid : For, if he seriously resolves to work himself out of the miserable State into which he is fallen, he must not stand considering, whether the Occasion be immediate or remote ; whether it
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threatens him with imminent Danger, or only at a Distance; but he must fly from it, if possible, tho' never so remote. He must labour to stifle, even the smallest Temptations in their very Birth, and avoid every Thing, how trivial soever in Appearance, that may serve to increase them. If he does otherwise, his Fall is almost unavoidable; because, considering the Prowess of his Nature to Sin, which is always ready, as it were, to meet the Temptation Half-way, the very remotest Occasion may very easily draw him into an immediate one; and the smallest Temptation, if neglected, may soon be heighten'd to a Degree of Violence, which he will not have the Resolution to resist. His Condition is much like that of a Man upon slippery Ice, who, when he is once in Motion, cannot stop when he will, because his very Weight carries him on whether he will or no; for so it is in some Measure with one that is habitually, and by consequence strongly, inclined to Sin. When the Passion is once raised, tho' by never so trivial an Occasion, 'tis very hard for him to put a Stop to it; for being pushed on by the Weight of corrupt Nature, he is often carried on to greater Extremities, than he either intended, or could have imagined at first.

Hence

Hence it follows, that the Amendment and Salvation of an habitual Sinner depends not so much upon the Performance of any one great or difficult Thing, as upon a constant Practice of a great Collection of little ones, and a Watchfulness in shunning all Occasions, tho' never so remote, of the Sin he is chiefly inclined to. And since his own Experience can best inform him what these are, he must be his own Director in a great Measure.

However, since considering Man's natural Inconstancy and Love of Liberty and Ease, this constant Watchfulness and Performance of a great Number of Things, tho' but small of themselves, must needs be burthensome to Nature, whoever is concerned in the Condition I speak of, and resolved to work himself out of it, must undertake this Task with *Steadiness* and *Courage*. *Steadiness* is necessary to render him uniform and constant, both in his Exercises of Devotion, and the Use of all other Remedies proper for his Cure. An aguish Devotion, made up of alternative Fits of Heat and Cold, will never do his Work; because he will always lose more Ground in the one, than he will get in the other. But *Courage* is no less requisite to make him go on chearfully in this Undertaking; because the many Duties that

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attend it, putting him of Course, under a great Restraint, both by depriving him of many Things he loves, and obliging him to many Things he hates, will strongly tempt him to throw off the Yoke, and return to his customary Liberties: Which Temptation is so powerful, that many, who have seemingly begun with the greatest Resolution, have at length been wearied out, and overcome by it.

He must therefore labour to arm himself against it; and when he finds the Thoughts of Liberty insinuating themselves, or any Degree of Despondency or Sloth creeping upon him, he must immediately rouse himself with these or such like Considerations; that if the Restraint he suffers be painful, 'tis far to be preferred before the Slavery of Sin; that how troublesome soever it be, his Condition has made it absolutely necessary; that since he has been the wilful Author of his own Distemper, it is but just, he should submit to the Trouble of the Cure; finally, he must encourage himself with considering, that the Task he has undertaken will, by a constant Performance, grow daily lighter upon his Hands; because every Victory he gets over himself, is like cutting off a Limb from the Body of Sin he has to grapple with; and that by Patience and Perseverance

rance he will not only deliver himself from the Servitude he truckles under, but prepare his Soul for the Crown, which Christ has promised to those that conquer.

The XXVIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The necessary Conditions of Repentance.

Bring forth therefore Fruits worthy of Penance. Luke iii. 8.

AS avoiding venial Sins keeps us at a Distance from Mortal, so a hearty and sincere Repentance strikes at the very Root of it; it cancels Sins past, and guards the Heart against their Return: But then it must be that Repentance which I call *heartly* and *sincere*: The proper Nature and necessary Conditions whereof shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

To mark out the necessary Conditions of a sincere Repentance, I cannot set before you a better Pattern, than what our Saviour himself proposes in the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*. This young Man, longing to be free from the Subjection and

Constraint he was under in his Father's House, demanded and obtained of him the Portion due to him in Reversion. Whereupon, taking leave of his Father, he went into a foreign Country; where, in a short Time, he spent all he had in Luxury and Riot, and fell under great Extremities of Poverty and Want; insomuch that, to prevent starving, he was forced to take Service under a Farmer, who put him to keep his Hogs; and his Hunger was so great, that he was even glad to eat of the Husks that were thrown to the Swine. But the Sense of his Misery brought him to himself, and gave him the first Thoughts of returning to his Father. He discoursed thus with himself: *How many hired Servants of my Father have Bread enough, and to spare? And I perish with Hunger. I will arise, and go to my Father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am not worthy to be called thy Son; make me as one of thy hired Servants.* Luke xv. 17, 18, &c. Which Resolution he performed accordingly, and was thereupon again received into Favour.

This is the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*, as far as relates to my present Subject. Let us now make the Application of it. You see, the first Step he made towards his being

ing reconciled to his Father, was the feeling Sense he had of his unhappy Condition ; for had he remained insensible of it, 'tis probable he never would have thought of returning to his Father. This marks out to us the Ground-work and Foundation of a sincere Repentance, *viz.* the feeling Sense a Sinner ought to have of the miserable State his Soul is fallen into, by having renounced the Subjection and Obedience he owed his heavenly Father.

Now, that this Ground-work of Repentance, which is to support the whole Building of a new spiritual Life, may be solid and lasting, it must be laid upon a double Motive, *viz.* the double Malice and Deformity of Sin ; *first*, in Relation to God ; and, *secondly*, in Relation to his own Soul. A Sinner therefore, that will lay the Foundation of a solid Repentance, and work himself into a hearty Sense of his unhappy State, must consider, with a serious Reflection, that he has offended a God of infinite Majesty ; rebelled against his Divine Sovereign ; trampled upon his sacred Laws ; trod under Foot the precious Blood of *Jesus Christ* ; violated the Covenant he made with him at his Baptism ; been false to his Vow ; ungrateful to a Benefactor, that has heaped infinite Blessings upon him ; despised his Friend-

ship, and preferred before it the sordid Interest or Pleasure procured him by his mortal Enemy the Devil.

These Truths, well considered and digested, will, with the Blessing God usually gives to our Endeavours, open a Sinner's Eyes, and excite him to a Horror and Detestation of his past Disorders. But when he has thus considered the Malice and Enormity of Sin, as it is an Offence of God, he must then proceed to consider it with Relation to his own Soul ; and here he will discover a frightful Scene, and find himself reduced to a State of Misery in Soul, infinitely lower, than the *Prodigal Son* was in Body, by having left his Father's House. A Soul in Grace is the Darling of Heaven, the Joy of Angels ; the adoptive Son of God, destined to inherit an everlasting Crown ; the Spouse of *Jesus Christ*, and Temple of the *Holy Ghost* ; rich in Merits, and adorned with all the precious Ornaments of Virtues, to render her acceptable to so Divine a Guest.

But, O good God ! What a Change, at the very Moment that a mortal Sin is consented to ! The most dreadful and surprising Turns of Fortune that ever have been heard or read of, all the tragical Scenes God's Wrath has ever exhibited on the
Theatre

Theatre of this World ; all the Desolations that Plague, War, and Famine have ever caused ; all the Revolutions of States, reduced from Happiness and Plenty, to Misery and Want, are but weak Images of it. Imagine the most charming Beauty transformed into an hideous Monster ; imagine the Heir-Apparent to a Crown become a Slave ; imagine the richest Monarch in the World reduced to Beggary ; finally, imagine a glorious and wealthy City laid waste, and turned into a Heap of Rubbish ; and whatever you can imagine, will come infinitely short of the Change wrought in a Soul, which, from the State of Grace, falls into that of mortal Sin.

But, to return to the Parable of the *Prodigal Son* ; as soon as he was become sensible of the Folly he had committed in quitting his Father's House, he took this Resolution, *I will arise and go to my Father* ; which he performed without Delay. Here we have the second Condition of a sincere Repentance mark'd out to us, *viz.* a firm and efficacious Purpose to rise from Sin, and quit all the Occasions of it. For, without this Purpose, all is but a sham Repentance. *If thou art Penitent (says St. Austin) be sorry for what thou hast done, if thou art*
F 4 *sorry*

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sorry for it, do it no more. For if thou continuest to do it, thou art no Penitent.

'Tis doubtless a manifest Delusion to imagine, there can be a true Conversion, of the Heart without any Change of Actions : Because a Heart that is truly converted, loves God, and values his Friendship above all Things of this World. For, as a Soul falls into Sin, by preferring some Interest or Pleasure before Almighty God, so she rises again from Sin, by preferring God before all Interest or Pleasure, and loving him more than any Advantage or Pleasure this World can propose. Now 'tis principally by our Actions we must judge, whether we love God to that Degree, as to prefer him effectually before all Things of this World ; because all deliberate Actions proceed from some Love or Inclination of the Heart. Love is the Root, and our Actions are the Fruit ; and 'tis by the Nature and Quality of the Fruit we must judge of the Nature and Quality of the Root, from which it grows. *A good Tree, says Christ, cannot bring forth bad Fruit, and a bad Tree cannot bring forth good Fruit.* And 'tis by the Fruit we must know, whether the Tree be good or bad.

How can we then rationally judge the Root is changed, as long as there appears no Change of Fruit? How can we judge
the

the Heart is truly converted, whilst the Actions remain the same? That a Person has a sincere Detestation of his past Sins, and yet continues in them? Finally, that the Love of God is predominant in his Heart, when no Effect of that Love appears in his Actions? This is wholly inconsistent with the Nature of Love or Charity; because Charity is a practical Virtue, which inclines the Soul to Action, and manifests itself by outward Works.

But, let us still keep in View the Pattern we have before us of the Prodigal Son. *I will rise, says he, and go to my Father, and I will say, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee: I am not worthy to be called thy Son; make me as one of thy hired Servants.* He begins with an humble Accusation of himself, and sincere Acknowledgment of the Fault he had committed. He prevents his Father's Justice by pronouncing Sentence upon himself. He not only submits to, but imposes on himself a rigorous Penance, which was to last his whole Life, and desires to be received into his Father's House, upon no other Terms, than to be treated there as a common Servant. Whereby we are not only taught, that Humility is an essential Part of Repentance, but also instructed in the very

Method how this Virtue is to be practised by a Penitent.

In the first Place therefore, the *Prodigal Son* begins as I have observed, with a sincere Acknowledgment of the Fault he had committed. He makes no Apologies or Excuses for himself, but represents his Fault under the most aggravating Circumstances, by owning himself guilty of a most grievous Offence, both against God and his Father.

'Tis a great Mark of a sincere Repentance, when a Sinner makes a plain and full Confession of his Sins, without the least Dissimulation or Disguise; when he lays the State of his Conscience clearly open before his Confessor, without mincing the Matter, or any studied Excuses, or artificial Palliations: When, finally, he is so disposed, that were it in his Power, he would open his Heart as fully to him, as it is known to God himself. For such an humble Disposition is a Sign he has a feeling Sense, both of the Offence he has committed, and the Desire he has to discharge his Conscience of it: But, when a Penitent uses certain Artifices to palliate his Sins, in order to save himself a little Confession; when he interweaves his Confessions with Apologies and Excuses, or indirect Accusations of others, to shove off Part of the
Blame

Blame from himself ; or, what is worse, when he wilfully omits some material or aggravating Circumstance, 'tis a sure Mark he is void of that humble Disposition, which a Penitent ought to bring with him to the sacred Tribunal : Because, whoever has a true Sense of having offended God, and considers he has deserved to suffer eternal Confusion before God and Man, is willing to submit to a short Humiliation in Exchange of the everlasting Shame and Confusion he has deserved. He thinks himself most mercifully dealt with, in being only obliged to discover that to a single Person, who is under the strictest Obligation of Secrecy, which, if he were treated according to his Merits, would be laid open to the View of all the World, and cover him with everlasting Shame and Confusion.

When therefore a Penitent has faithfully practised this first Lesson of Humility, by submitting to the Confusion of a sincere and full Declaration of his Sins, let him proceed to the second, consisting in a hearty Desire to satisfy God's Justice by *worthy Fruits of Repentance*. This Lesson of Humility is clearly taught us in the Behaviour of the *Prodigal Son*. For having humbly confess'd his Fault, he is so far from soliciting for an entire Exemption from Punishment, that he even suggests to his
Father

Father the Manner, how he deserved to be chastised by him. *I am not worthy*, says he, *to be called thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.* This marks out plainly to every Penitent, of what Rank soever he be, that from the Time of his Reconciliation to his heavenly Father, till the last Moment of his Life, he is bound to become an humble and faithful Servant of *Jesus Christ*, submit to all his Laws, and stoop to the humble Yoke of the Gospel. This, with repeated Acts of a sincere Contrition, is precisely his Duty, in the faithful Discharge whereof, he may hope to satisfy the Justice of his offended Father, by worthy Fruits of Repentance.

'Tis certain indeed, that the Divine Justice demands a kind of Proportion between Punishment and Sin. But, the Measure of this Proportion is unknown to us. God will exactly observe it in the World to come, and he who endeavours to come nearest to it in this, does certainly put himself into the securest Way to Salvation. But this Rule being very general, is apt to perplex great Sinners, who yet are the Persons particularly concern'd in the comfortable Moral of the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*, I suppose then, that a Person, who has led a disorderly Life for a long Time, is touch'd with a sincere Repentance, and being.

ing desirous to return to God, asks what he must do in order to it. I answer him in short, that after he has made a general Confession of his whole Life, and accepted the particular Penance his Confessor shall enjoin him, he must, from that Time forward, be faithful in Performing all the Duties of a Christian Life. Nothing can be more reasonable and practicable than this. Let me explain myself: He must, I say, be faithful in performing all the Duties of a Christian Life; that is, he must renounce Sin, and all the Occasions of it: He must live in an intire Observance of the Commandments of God, and the Precepts of the Church to the utmost of his Power: He must suffer all Crosses God sends him with an humble Patience: Finally, he must be faithful in the Discharge of all the Duties of his respective State, and endeavour to do all this in the Spirit of Penance, supplying what may be wanting to the Rigour of it, by a profound Humility, and the constant Practice of some voluntary Mortifications.

But since an End can never be attain'd without the Use of proper Means in Order to it; the Practice of the Duties I have mention'd, draws after it an indispensable Obligation of a regular and uniform Devotion: This being the Channel, through
which

which God's Grace must pass to strengthen a Penitent in the good Resolutions he has made, and enable him to walk on steadily in the Path of God's Commandments. The principal Branches of what I call a regular and uniform Devotion, are Morning and Evening Prayer ; a devout Observance of Sundays and Holydays ; the daily Reading of some spiritual Book, and the Use of the Sacraments at set Times. All which must be regulated with a due Regard to the respective Circumstances a Person is under.

This is the Task a repenting Sinner must undertake, of what State or Condition soever he be. No Rank or Quality can exempt him from it: Tho' he be a crown'd Head, if he pretends to enter into the true Way of Penance, he must perform all the Duties I have mark'd out : This he must do, cost what it will. He must renounce Sin, and all the Occasions of it: And since it is an undoubted Maxim in Morality, that he who is obliged to the End, is likewise obliged to all the necessary Means in Order to it ; it follows that a regular and uniform Devotion is also an indispensable Part of his Duty ; because without it he cannot hope to obtain the Grace necessary to enable him to live up to the Character of a Christian.

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This also draws after it an Obligation of all such voluntary Self-denials, as he shall find necessary to subdue his Passions, and to preserve in himself the Spirit of a Penitent. If a repenting Sinner be perseveringly faithful in the Discharge of these Duties, he needs not doubt but he is in that narrow Way, which leads to Salvation. *For he who puts his Hand to the Plough, and looks not back*; that is, who lives in the Practice of all Christian Duties whatsoever, and continues in them to his Death, *is fit for the Kingdom of God*, and will certainly be saved.

Thus then you see all the Steps a Sinner must make in his Return to his heavenly Father: He must begin with a deep Sense of the Disorders of his Life past: He must make an efficacious Purpose to rise from Sin: He must undergo the Confusion of a full and clear Confession of his Sins: Finally, he must resolve to satisfy God's Justice by worthy Fruits of Repentance. I have shew'd what this imports, and the Obligations it draws after it. It concerns us now to consider, whether the Recovery of God's Favour be not well worth a chearful Compliance with these Duties. I have not mention'd any extraordinary Rigours, being sensible all are not strong enough to bear this Yoke: But the
Yoke

Yoke I have propos'd, is no other than that of the *Gospel*, which *Christ* himself has impos'd on all his Followers. And therefore whoever says he is too weak to bear it, declares implicitly his Resolution not to do Penance, nor save his Soul.

'Tis true, a Sinner newly converted, cannot live up to all the Duties of a Christian, without using great Violence to himself. But he must consider that *Penance* is a *laborious Baptism*, and that he cannot be saved without doing Penance. He must consider that Heaven is to be gain'd by Violence, and that whoever pretends to attain to it any other Way, than that of subduing his Passions, pretends to have found out a new Path, wholly unknown to the four Evangelists. Finally, he must consider, that the particular Difficulties he will meet with from the Strength and Violence of his Passions, as they are the Fruit of his past Sins, so are they a just Punishment of them, to which he must submit, and draw an Advantage from, by making it a Part of the Penance, by which God's Justice is to be satisfied. He has invited an Enemy into his Country, and he must be at the Trouble of driving him out by Force of Arms: But to be successful in this spiritual Warfare, he must resolve never to lose Courage, nor suffer himself

to fall into the least Despondency either of God's Grace or Mercy, who will most certainly crown such patient Endeavours with the Reward promised to those, who persevere to the End.

THE XXVIIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Danger of delaying Repentance.

Delay not to be converted to God, and put it not off from Day to Day. Eccl. v. 8.

THE Delay of Repentance has proved fatal to Thousands. How many forming to themselves imaginary Schemes of returning to God sometime or other, they knew not when, have at last been harden'd in Sin, and died impenitent? How many again, projecting to execute their Resolutions of Amendment at some fixed Time, have been prevented by a sudden and unprovided Death? I know habitual Sinners are apt to flatter themselves, that since sudden Deaths are but rare, they need not disquiet themselves with excessive Fears on that Account. But I heartily wish they may not find their Error when it is too late.

late. And since it is an Error of the most dangerous Consequence; I shall endeavour to disabuse them, by showing that the Number of those, who are surpris'd by Death, is far greater than is usually imagin'd; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

The Point in Question being a Matter of Fact, you may perhaps expect to be entertain'd with frightful Relations of Persons suddenly carried off by Apoplexies, or found dead in their Beds, after they laid down in perfect Health; or crush'd with the Fall of a House; or struck dead with Thunder; or burnt alive with some accidental Fire. But it is not my Intention to trouble you with a long Enumeration of Accidents of this Nature: Neither do I design to lay any Stress upon the many tragical Relations of Hurricanes, that have laid whole Countries waste; of Inundations, wherein many Thousands have perish'd in a Moment; or finally, of frightful Earth-quakes, that have in an Instant levell'd whole Cities with the Ground, and buried their unfortunate Inhabitants under their Ruins.

It is not my Intention, I say, to insist upon these, or other such unquestionable Facts; tho' they might suffice to convince us on the one Hand, that the Number of those,

those, who are surpris'd by Death, is not so small, as is usually imagin'd; and to assure us on the other, that the Odds each one has on his Side, is a very unsafe Foundation to build any Security upon. For, tho' a Concurrence of natural Causes contributes for the most Part to occasion those great and general Disasters, and some Places are more obnoxious to their unhappy Influences than others; yet we ought principally to consider them as Instruments of the Divine Wrath justly provok'd to those exemplary Chastisements, by the Sins of the People; and, by Consequence, till we are sure our Lives are more innocent than theirs were, or that the Sins of this Nation are less crying than theirs, which we have no great Encouragement to think; we have Reason enough to fear, the Divine Justice, which never wants Means to execute its Decrees, may sooner or later condemn us to taste of the same bitter Cup, so many others have drunk before us.

I shall only touch upon one familiar Reflection, before I come to my principal Proof. Is there any one amongst us arriv'd at the Age of Man, that has not one Time or other been expos'd to some Danger, in which it was at least an equal Hazard that he might have perish'd? 'Tis true Almighty God has been so merciful as to have
hitherto

hitherto preserved us in these Occasions; and without all Dispute, his Goodness ought rather to affect us with a due Sense of Gratitude, than encourage us to persist in Sin upon a rash Presumption of being still favour'd with the like Protection. However, it is most certain, that our having escaped past Dangers, is a Proof that we have been really expos'd to them: And if these be so common, that we cannot, with all the Precautions possible, prevent our being every now and then concern'd in them, it follows plainly, that it is a great Rashness to build any Security upon our Hopes of not falling under the Misfortune of a sudden and unprovided Death.

But, to come to my principal Proof, I give it now for granted, that those sudden Deaths, which are occasioned by unforeseen Accidents, are not so frequent, but that each particular Person may have considerable Odds on his Side, that it will not be his Misfortune to perish that Way: Yet give me leave to tell you, there are other Sorts of Deaths, which, in Effect, are really sudden and surprising, tho' they appear, and are vulgarly esteemed otherwise: For may not all those be properly said to be surpris'd by Death, who are overtaken by it much sooner than they expected? Or, may not that be called surprising,
which

which comes upon us when we look not for it, and therefore finds us unprepared? We shall certainly think it so, if we but consult the most ordinary and familiar Notions of Things. A General of an Army is, for Example, said to be surprised, when his Enemy attacks him either unlook'd for, or much sooner than he expected. A Criminal, who thinks to have his Trial put off, when he finds himself summoned to the Bar before the Time imagined, is truly surprised, and taken un-awares. In like Manner, therefore, all those, upon whom Death seizes much sooner than it is looked for, are properly surprised by it.

Now, is not this the Case of most worldly Persons, that is, of those who are Lovers of this World? There is great Reason to believe it so; *first*, because it being very natural to flatter ourselves with the Hope of what we heartily wish and desire, it follows, that those, who love this World, as they desire to stay long in it, so are they apt enough to believe they shall, and make their Wishes the Measure of their Hopes; and therefore 'tis no Wonder, they should be greatly surprised, when they find both the one and the other wholly disappointed by an untimely or unexpected End.

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The *second* Reason is, because the Thought of Death being an ungrateful Entertainment to those that are fond of this World, they usually decline it as much as they can; and if it sometimes obtrudes itself, they immediately divert it with some more pleasing Thought. Now what can be the Consequence hereof, but that whenever it comes upon them, it comes wholly unlooked for, and finds every Thing out of Order? For can any Thing come more unlook'd for, than what was scarce ever so much as thought of? Those indeed, who often entertain themselves with the Thoughts of Death, and contract a kind of Familiarity with it, take care not to be unprepared, because they live in daily Expectation of it. But as for those that never think of it, but against their Wills, how should they ever be prepared for it? And if they never are prepared for it, how should it but surprise them when it comes?

But, to pass from general Reasons to particular *Instances*; I shall chiefly exemplify in *two* sorts of Persons: The first, are of those who have their Heads full of worldly Projects; one, for Example, is in Pursuit of some great Fortune; another, has his Children to settle in the World; another, has a Project of raising his Family; and so forth. Now, tho' Projects of this

this Nature be not only lawful in themselves, but absolutely consistent with the Watchfulness a Christian ought to have, and the Concerns of his Soul, yet many Times it happens quite otherwise; but particularly in Relation to those that have but little Sense of Religion, and are cold in the Practice of its Duties. For when Persons of this Temper happen to have any worldly Business upon their Hands, they generally pursue it with that Eagerness, and over-earnest Application, that the Heart is wholly engaged that Way, and scarce any Time or Thought is allowed for the more weighty Concerns of Eternity.

But, alas! how often does it happen, that whilst they are thus busy in pursuing their worldly Projects, Death is at the same Time pursuing them close at the Heels? How often does it happen, that before their beloved Designs are brought to an Issue, a mortal Distemper overtakes them, and hurries them, perhaps, in two or three Days Warning, to another World? And are not these Men now surprised by Death, whom it thus cuts off before they are got Half-way to their intended Journey's End? They probably reckon'd upon many Years of Life, or at least sufficient Time to accomplish their Designs; in the mean Time, the Concerns of Eternity were neglected;

lected ; no Preparation was made, no Provision laid up for the Life to come ; and here they find themselves all on a sudden in the Hands of Death, and summoned before God's Tribunal, without having taken any Measures to dispose themselves seriously for that great Trial, on which their everlasting Lot depends. And is not this a very great and dreadful Surprise ?

The second Sort of Persons usually concerned in this Misfortune, are those who put off the Reformation of their Lives, either wholly at Random, or to some prefixed Time they propose to themselves. As for Instance, a young Man, that is vigorous and healthful, considers Death at a great Distance, when it will perhaps seize him within a few Days. He depends upon the Advantages of Youth, or the Strength of his Constitution, and doubts not but to see many Years pass over his Head. This flattering Prospect of a long Life encourages him to let loose the Reins to his youthful Passions, and indulge himself in all sinful Liberties. He thinks it will be Time enough to become sober and virtuous, when the Heat of Youth is over ; for then he resolves to take up in earnest. But, alas ! he is quite out in his Accounts ! Death, that inflexible Executioner of the Divine Decrees, overtakes him in the full Career

Career of his Youth, and youthful Passions; he is suddenly nipped, like a fair Blossom in an *April* Frost; all his fine Purposes are blasted: His Body, which but a few Days before was so vigorous and healthful, is sent cold to the Grave, and his Soul to the Tribunal of God; there to receive her irrevocable Doom. And does not Death again come very unlook'd for, and unexpected, to all Persons under these unhappy Circumstances?

Another finds himself deeply engaged in some Habit of Sin; and, upon hearing a Sermon, or reading some good Book, is made sensible of the Danger of his State, and resolves to mend. But he cannot come to a Resolution to set about it immediately. Some Business of Moment lies upon his Hands, and must first be dispatched: He is under certain Engagements, which must first be broke; and this cannot be done all at once: But he will have more Leisure and Opportunity afterwards to apply himself seriously to the Concerns of his Soul's Salvation. With these, and such like plausible Pretences, which, in Effect, are but suggested by, and serve to flatter corrupt Nature, he deludes himself into a Persuasion, that it is better to put off the Business of his de-

signed Reformation, till these pretended Obstacles are removed.

But what happens in the mean Time? Whilst he is thus seemingly big with Resolutions, to be executed he knows not when, a mortal Fever seizes him: The Doctor is immediately sent for; who, to increase his Misfortune, flatters him perhaps to the very last with Hopes of Recovery; till manifest Symptoms of approaching Death appearing, he is at length forced to tell him his Case is desperate, and that he must prepare to die. And what a dreadful Surprise, what a Thunder-stroke, must this be to one in his Condition! I can compare it with nothing more properly than the Consternation of a City surprised by an Enemy: And as in this Case nothing is done orderly, or according to the Rules of Discipline, but all Things are carried on with Hurry, Disorder, and Confusion; so, in the Case of a Person unexpectedly alarmed with the News of approaching Death, no Order or Method is observed, but every Thing is performed with a Precipitation answerable to the pressing Exigency of the unhappy Condition of the Party concerned.

A Priest is sent for in Haste. As soon as he comes, a Confession must be made, tho' without any regular Preparation, because

cause the Case admits of no Delay. The other Sacraments follow of Course, with the same Hurry and Precipitation; and with this lame Preparation his Soul goes forth to try her Fortune in the other World: But I leave every one to judge, whether a Person in this Case be not surpris'd by Death, since it obliges him to hazard his Soul upon so weak a Bottom, and undertake his great Voyage of Eternity with such a disproportioned and irregular Preparation, as cannot but render his Salvation extremely doubtful: And since this happens but too frequently, it follows, that the Case of those, who are surpris'd by Death, is not so rare, as is usually imagined.

But you will ask, How can that Death be called surprizing, which, having some Days of Sicknefs before it, gives the Party concerned Warning of its coming, and consequently sufficient Leisure to prepare himself? I answer, that the Death of a Person habituated to Sin, and in this Condition seized with that Distemper, whereof he dies in a few Days Warning; his Death, I say, is truly and effectually surprizing. My Reason is, because, altho' he has some Days of Sicknefs allowed him, yet, morally speaking, he can scarce be said to have sufficient Leisure allowed him to prepare himself. The Case is evident, if the

Distemper happens to affect his Head, and take away from him the Use of his Reason: For, alas! where is then the very Possibility of making any Manner of Preparation! And is there any Thing more ordinary, either in malignant Fevers, or other mortal Distempers, than to have the Use of Reason quite taken away, and the Party concerned wholly incapacitated for any serious, nay rational Thought? So that, in this Case, a Person under the fore-mentioned Circumstances is as effectually surprised by Death, as if he were shot dead with a Cannon-bullet; since it cannot be doubted, but that Death is truly surprising which excludes all Possibility of a Preparation, by whatever Accident the Impossibility of it is occasioned.

'Tis true, it seldom happens, that sick Men's Ravings are so uninterrupted, as not to allow them some lucid Intervals, in which they may be capable of reflecting on the Danger of their State: But, supposing all this, and even allowing them the Use of Reason, as much as Men mortally sick can have; yet, considering their sad State, on the one Hand, and the Disadvantages of a dying Man on the other, we may still say that, morally speaking, such an one has not sufficient Leisure to prepare himself. The Reason
is,

is, because the Sufficiency or Insufficiency of Time or Leisure cannot be justly measured, but with a due Regard, partly to the Nature of the Work that is to be performed, and partly to the Circumstances of the Party concerned; because what is sufficient Leisure for an easy Piece of Work, and to one that lies under no Impediment, may be altogether insufficient for a Work of a difficult Nature, and in Relation to a Person, that labours under such hard Circumstances, as must needs be a very great Hindrance to his due Performance of it.

As, for Example, much less Time and Leisure is required to make up a short and easy Account, than one that is much entangled and has been neglected for several Months or Years; so that if a careful Steward, who daily makes up his Accounts, should be summoned by his Master at half an Hour's Warning, tho' the Time of half an Hour be but short in itself, yet that Steward would not be taken unawares, because his daily Care in looking into his Accounts secures him against all Possibility of a Surprise: But if another Steward, that has neglected his Accounts for several Years, should be called upon by his Master, and that at a Time when he is laid up with a Fever, or the Gout; we may truly say, that tho' he had a whole Week's Warning

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given him, he would be taken unawares ; because, tho' a Week be much longer than half an Hour, yet, since it is not only disproportioned to the Difficulty of the Work he has to perform, but his Indisposition renders him over and above incapable of setting heartily about it, it follows, that he would be as really and effectually surprised, as if he had been summoned upon one half Hour's Warning.

Now, this is a lively Image of the Case before us, if we consider it with a due Regard both to the Difficulty of the Work that is to be performed, and the Impediments that hinder the Performance of it: For, *first*, as to the Difficulty of the Work that is to be performed ; to express it in a Word, it is a true Change of a Heart corrupted with Habits of Sin, and accustomed to resist the Divine Inspirations ; of a Heart that has been an utter Stranger to the Love of God, and harden'd against the most powerful Motives to soften it into Compunction. And is this a Work to be begun in our last Sickness ? Is that a proper Time for so difficult a Task ? Or is it such an easy Matter to banish from the Heart a predominant Love, that has been long fixed and established in it ? Do we find, by Experience, that we can love or hate the same Object, and change our Affec-

Affections or Aversions just as we please? Nay, does it not convince us, on the contrary, that to disengage the Heart from any Passion of long Growth, is a Work which requires both Time and Patience in a long Practice of serious Endeavours? We are sure *St. Austin* found it so; who, in his *Confessions*, owns, that even after his Judgment was fully convinced, his stubborn and rebellious Heart held out for many Years.

'Tis true, there is no Difficulty in repeating a verbal Act of Contrition, or pronouncing an Act of the Love of God; but there is a large Difference between saying and doing. If Sorrow and Repentance were no more than so much Lip-labour, the Case would be much alter'd from what it really is: But there is something more required than this; the Heart must be truly changed, and speak within what the Tongue pronounces outwardly: Almighty God, who for so many Years has been contemned, and set at naught, must be truly and sincerely loved above all Things: The Object of a Passion, that has always been cherish'd, must be truly hated and detested: And here lies the Stress of the Difficulty, which, since it usually costs even those that are in perfect Health much Time and Labour, we may easily guess how little a Person, struggling under the

Pains and Terrors of approaching Death, is qualified for the Performance of it : For if this be a difficult Task even in Time of Health, when the Mind is composed and serene, and the Party concerned has all the Advantages of Prayer, pious Books, and reiterated Consideration, to come into his Assistance, how will he be able to perform it in any tolerable Manner, when, being seized with a violent and mortal Distemper, he is render'd almost utterly incapable of using any of these Exercises, and consequently deprived of every Thing that should be a Help and Encouragement to him ?

For can there be imagined a greater Hindrance to a serious Application to any Business, that requires Thinking, than a Sickness, whereby the whole Body is put into a violent Ferment, and disorder'd in the highest Degree ? Do we not find, by Experience, that even a slight Indisposition suffices to render us incapable either of reading or praying with any tolerable Attention ? And why so ? Because the Soul, attending then to the Pain itself, is diverted by it from attending to any other Object : And how then will she be able to apply herself to the weighty Concerns of Salvation, when the Body is seized all over with a mortal Anguish ? When the Head is
disturbed

disturbed with violent Achings? The Stomach tortured with unspeakable Oppressions? The Heart besieged on all Sides with the Pangs of Death? How can we imagine a Person in this Condition capable of an Application answerable to the Greatness and Difficulty of so weighty a Concern? So that it is evident, a Sinner's last Sickness is so far from giving him sufficient Opportunity to prepare himself for Death, that there is no Part of his whole Life more improper for it: And, by consequence, we may justly fear, that tho' he has the Use of his Reason for some Days, Death takes him unprovided; because he has neglected to make any Provision for it beforehand, and is at that Time under such hard Circumstances, as are the greatest Impediments imaginable to a due Preparation for it.

Thus we plainly see the Danger of delaying Repentance, because either a sudden Death may prevent the very Possibility of it; or, if our last Sickness allows us some Time, it usually obstructs the due Performance of it with such Difficulties, as cannot but render the Sincerity of it very hazardous and uncertain. Let us then practise the Advice given us by *Ecclesiasticus*, *Not to delay to be converted, nor to put it off from Day to Day.*

The XXIXth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Necessity and Efficacy of Prayer.

Ask, and ye shall receive. John xvi.

PRayer, when duly performed, is the great Remedy against Sin, and whoever prays well, cannot but live and die well; if therefore we fail in the one, and miscarry in the other, we must attribute it either to the *Neglect*, or some *Defect* of Prayer; and conclude with St. *James*, that *when we ask, and receive not, it is because we ask amiss.*

There are some, who by their Neglect of this holy Exercise, seem not sufficiently convinced of its *Necessity*; Others not finding their Prayers crown'd with the Success they propos'd to themselves, stagger in their Faith, question its *Efficacy*, and so either lay their Devotions wholly aside, or perform them only by Fits and Starts: Others again, are indeed uniform in performing their daily Task, but do it with that Hurry, Coldness, and Dissipation of Mind, that they seldom go beyond the Form and Ceremony of Prayer. Lastly, there are some, who pray heartily indeed, and yet receive not, because they ask
Things

Things not conducing to the real Interest of their Souls. These therefore being the Obstacles, which chiefly obstruct the Use or Fruit of Prayer? I shall speak of them in the three following Discourses, and shew 1. Its *Necessity* and *Efficacy*. 2. The *Conditions* that ought to attend it. And 3. The *End*, to which it ought to be directed. The *Necessity* and *Efficacy* of Prayer, shall be considered in this Entertainment.

The entire Dependance we have upon Almighty God, is a convincing Proof of the Necessity of Prayer, which is the ordinary Channel, through which God's Grace is convey'd to the Soul. Now, to prevent the least Doubt of our depending entirely upon God; *Christ* himself has declared it, in the strongest Terms. The Passage I mean, is that of the 15th Chapter of *St. John*, where our Saviour compares himself to a *Vine*, and all Christians to the *Branches* of it: For of all Branches, none are more useless than a Vine-branch, when it is not nourished by the Vine: For it can neither bear Fruit, nor be adapted to any Manner of Use; nay (as *Ezekiel* says) not so much as to serve for a Pin to hang a Vessel on; but is only fit to be burnt. And therefore our Saviour pursues the Similitude thus. *As a Branch cannot bear Fruit, except it abide in the Vine,*

no more can ye, except ye abide in me. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much Fruit. But if a Man abide not in me, he is cast forth, and is wither'd; and Men gather them, and cast them into the Fire. Joh. xv. 4, 5, 6.

Nothing can be a more lively Representation of our entire Dependance on the Grace of *Jesus Christ*, than what is set forth in this Similitude. However, lest we should imagine his Grace to be only necessary for the most difficult Acts of Virtue, he closes the foremention'd Parable, with these remarkable Words, *without me ye can do nothing*. Whereupon St. *Austin* discourses thus, *he says not, ye can do little without me, but ye can do nothing without me*. Whence he infers, *wherefore whether it be much or little, it cannot be done without him, without whom nothing can be done*. No, not the least Thing conducive to Salvation can be done, without the Grace of *Jesus Christ*. And therefore St. *Paul* assures us positively, *that we are not even sufficient to think, as of ourselves; but our Sufficiency is of God. 2 Cor. iii. 5.* and in the Hymn said in the Mass during the whole Octave of *Pentecost*, we address ourselves thus to the divine Spirit, *sine tuo Numine, nihil est in Homine, nihil est innoxium*; that is, *without thy Grace Man has nothing but what is sinful.* Hence

Hence it plainly follows, that without God's Grace we can neither practise Virtue, nor overcome Sin; and it remains now only to consider, whether Prayer be not the ordinary Means, appointed by God to obtain this Blessing. These Words of Christ, *ask and ye shall receive*; and again, *pray that ye enter not into Temptation*. Matth. xxvi. 41. leave no Room to doubt of it. And therefore both St. *Thomas of Aquin*, and the holy Fathers before him teach unanimously, that it is decreed by God from all Eternity, that no Blessing shall be received but by the Means of Prayer.

St. *John Climacus* tells us, that *Prayer is the Source of all Virtues, and the Channel through which the Grace of Jesus Christ and all Gifts from above are conveyed to us. He calls it the Nourishment of the Soul; the Light which dissipates the Darkness of the Mind; an excellent Remedy against Temptations. A Pledge of God's Love to a Soul, and a Mark of Predestination.*

St. *Austin* calls Prayer the *Key of Heaven*, which unlocks all its Treasures, and gives us Access to the Blessings there laid up for us: Others compare it to *Jacobs Ladder*, by which Angels ascend to Heaven, to represent our Necessities to the Giver of all good Gifts, and descend again on Earth to bring us new Blessings from thence:
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And therefore as we stand daily in Need of God's Grace, to strengthen us against the Temptations we live continually exposed to, so it is our Duty to beg it daily of him.

The 17th Chapter of *Exodus* contains a remarkable Figure of this Truth. 'Tis there related that the *Amalekites* having raised a formidable Army to dispute the Passage of the Israelites into *Canaan*, *Moses* commanded *Joshua* to lead them on against the Enemy: But at the same Time being sensible that God alone could give the Victory, he retired to the Top of a neighbouring Mountain with *Aaron* and *Hur*, in Order to implore the Divine Assistance. The next Day therefore whilst *Israel* fought against *Amalec*, and *Joshua* performed all the Parts of a General, *Moses* pray'd for a Blessing upon his People, and ceased not all the Time from lifting up his Hands to Heaven: But the Battle lasting many Hours, he was so tired with that painful Posture, that he could not hold them up any longer; and the Scripture observes, that as soon as *Moses* let down his Hands, *Aaron* and *Hur* perceived from the Top of the Mountain, that *Amalec* prevail'd against the *Israelites*; whereupon *Moses* sat down upon a Stone, and *Aaron* and *Hur* placing themselves on each side of him, supported his Hands, and immediately
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the *Israelites* recover'd the Ground they had lost, and gained a complete Victory.

This is a plain Figure of what happens to us in our spiritual Combats. For, as the *Amalekites* endeavour'd to oppose the Passage of the *Israelites* into the Land of Promise, so the Devil employs his utmost Strength to obstruct our happy Passage into the heavenly *Canaan*. The Means then to disappoint his Malice, is to retire daily to the Mountain of Prayer, and there humbling ourselves under the powerful Hand of God, by a deep Sense of our own Weakness, implore his merciful Protection, and never cease lifting up our Hands to Heaven, till we have obtain'd a complete Victory over him : For, if we grow weary of this holy Exercise ; if Sloth prevails upon us to let fall our Hands, that is, to abandon or discontinue our Prayers, the Enemy will most certainly gain Ground, and prevail against us : Because Gods holy Grace being our only Security, if we forfeit this Blessing by a Neglect of the Means appointed to obtain it, we become destitute of Strength, are left to our own Weakness, and our Condition is no better than that of Soldiers presuming to come into the Field naked and unarm'd.

St. *Austin*, to express our spiritual Poverty, and Dependence on the divine Assistance,

ance, says, *we are all Beggars of God.* 'Tis therefore fitting, and he requires it of us, that we should address ourselves to him with the same unwearied Application, as Beggars do to keep themselves from Starving: For a Beggar is never weary of asking, as long as there is Hopes of getting any Thing: He waits whole Hours at the rich Man's Door: He watches all Occasions to meet him, and lay his Necessities before him: When Alms are to be distributed, he is never out of the Way: In a word, as Hunger and Want attend him every Day, so 'tis his daily Business to seek for Relief.

This then must be our Pattern, in Relation to the Duty of Prayer: This must be our constant Method, if we intend to keep our Souls from Starving, as they will certainly do in Case we neglect to procure them the Supplies they daily stand in need of. We must never be weary of Asking, since Almighty God is never weary of giving: We must be daily knocking at the Gates of our bountiful Benefactor, and lose no Opportunity of presenting ourselves before him; especially when he is present on the Altar; where he is an inexhaustible Source of Blessings to those, who make their humble Supplications to him, and come with Hearts dilated to receive them:

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Finally, we must proportion the Earnestness and Assiduity of our Prayers to the Greatness of our Necessities and Wants.

But the slothful Christian pretends to be at a Loss to find a Precept, that obliges him to Pray every Day. But, if I should ask him what Precept obliges him to eat every Day, he would not be much at a Loss to answer the Question; he would soon tell me a natural Principle of Self-preservation obliges him to it: He would tell me, that unless his Body were daily nourished, his Strength would fail him; he would be unable to do his Work, and starve for want of it. Now let him apply these Reasons to the Soul, where they have at least as much Weight, and he will soon see the Obligation of a daily Prayer. For doubtless our Souls have as just a Title to our daily Care, as our Bodies: And therefore, since Prayer is their necessary Nourishment, if we pray not every Day, our spiritual Health will be impair'd, and decay by insensible Degrees: We shall be unable to discharge the Duties incumbent on us: Finally, our Souls will languish for Want of their due Allowance of spiritual Food to support them.

You will ask, does it not suffice then to keep the Commandments, as they are delivered to us? Does it not suffice to hear
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Mass on Sundays and Holy-days according to the Precept of the Church? To the first Question I answer, it is not to be doubted, but whoever keeps the Commandments, will be saved: But can the Commandments be kept without the Help of God's Grace? Or, will God bestow his Grace upon us without our asking? Are we not daily tempted to Sin against the Commandments? And has not our Saviour ordered us to *Pray, that we enter not into Temptation?* Does he not bid us *ask, seek, and knock?* Nay, *to pray always, and never be weary?* And why so? Because as the Devil is indefatigable in seeking our Ruin, so ought we to be indefatigable in soliciting Heaven to protect us against him; so that the very Obligation of daily keeping the Commandments, implies an Obligation of daily Prayer; and we need no other Commandment, than the Commandments themselves, to oblige us to it: Because the same Law that commands any Duty, induces of Course an Obligation to imploy such Means, as are necessary for the Discharge of it.

Now, as to the Precept of the Church, which only obliges us to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy-days; the Church in limiting this Obligation, had a prudent Regard to the generality of Christians: And, since she foresaw that many would be under Circumstances,

circumstances, which would render their daily complying with this Duty morally impossible, and Sloth might prevail upon others to transgress frequently against it, ~~the~~ would not impose a daily Obligation, which might be an Occasion of endless Scruples to some, and a stumbling Block to others. But 'tis very certain, the Church's Intention was not either to encourage Sloth, or inspire us with an Indifference to hear or not hear Mass upon ordinary Days, but rather to create in us a great Esteem of this Devotion, by making it a necessary and principal Duty of the most solemn Days in the Year.

But there is a second Objection particularly against the *Efficacy* of Prayer, grounded upon the little Appearance of its Fruit in many Persons, who seem to be much addicted to it. For if Prayer were so powerful a Remedy against Sin, as I have endeavoured to shew, the Consequence would be, that the more we pray'd, the more we should be exempt from Failings. Whereas the contrary appears in many, who, though they daily spend much Time in Prayer, yet have their Failings, as well as they who pray less.

To this I answer, *first*, that if they who pray very much, are still subject to many Failings, 'tis very probable, their Condition

Condition would still be worse, in Case they prayed less. Just as when a Person has an ill Habit of Body, the Remedies he takes will not hinder his being often out of Order; but, in all Likelihood, his Case would be much worse, if he took less Care of himself: And therefore, as there are some malignant Humours, which cannot be corrected but by a long Course of Physick, so there are some Distempers in the Soul, which, according to the ordinary Course of Grace, require a much longer Application of Remedies than others; and it would be next to a Miracle, if a Passion of long Growth, and deeply rooted in the Soul, were perfectly master'd on a sudden. So that the Objection proposed proves not the Weakness or Inefficacy of the Remedy, but the Malignity of the Distemper it sometimes meets with.

However, St. James has given a second Answer to it in these Terms: *Ye ask, and ye obtain not, because ye ask amiss.* Many seem, in outward Appearance, to pray very often, yet, in effect, pray very seldom; They recite indeed many Prayers, and are very busy in turning their Books, or dropping their Beads, yet, with all this Pother, pray very little; because Prayer is not a mere Lip-labour, but consists principally in the Desires of the Heart; for, to speak properly,

properly, vocal Prayer is nothing but the Desires of the Heart expressed in Words: So that where there is no Desire of the Heart, there is no Prayer, tho' the Lips and Tongue be never so busy. Now 'tis certain, there are many who read, or recite their Prayers, without any sincere or hearty Desire to obtain the Things signified by those Prayers: And, by Consequence, there are many who say their Prayers without praying.

This is the Case, *first*, of those that say their Prayers by Rote, and out of mere Custom, without any Application of the Mind; for these pray not much better than so many Parrots, that should be taught to repeat our Lord's-Prayer: In Effect, if their Distractions be voluntary, all their praying is no more than so much talking in their Sleep. *Secondly*, 'Tis their Case who resolve to continue in the immediate Occasion of Sin; for how can they have a hearty Desire to overcome Sin, who resolve to live exposed to such Occasions as will certainly lead them into it? *Thirdly*, 'Tis the Case of all such as come to pray with an actual Affection to Sin; because a wilful Affection to any Thing is inconsistent with a Hatred of it. Now we can only have a hearty Desire to be delivered from Things which we regard as Evils, and have by Consequence some Degree of Hatred to.

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Thus we see how Persons may seem to pray very much, and yet pray very little in Effect; because they may ask, without desiring to obtain; and therefore 'tis no Wonder, if praying in this Manner, they continue subject to all the Infirmities of corrupt Nature: For 'tis not by such Mock-prayers a Sinner draws down Mercy from Heaven; 'tis the Prayer of a *contrite and humble Heart*, the Prayer of a Soul sensible of her unhappy State, and earnestly desiring to be delivered from it, which God had a Regard to. And therefore, if our Prayers prove unsuccessful, 'tis an evident Mark they were defective some Way or other: And this is so certain a Truth, that it can admit of no Dispute.

For since Christ has made us a positive Promise, that *his Father will grant us whatever we shall ask in his Name*, it follows, that we must either question the Veracity of his Promise, or conclude, that when we fail of obtaining what we ask, there has been some Defect in our Prayers, which has justly deserved a Refusal; supposing always that what we ask'd, was for the Good of our Souls: And therefore, whoever prays to be delivered from his usual Failings, and yet continues in them, will find, upon a serious Enquiry, that he either has not prayed as much as he ought, or has been guilty of some Neglect in the Performance

Performance of it. So that, upon his falling into any Sin, let him but call himself to an Account, and reflect seriously, whether he took Care to raise his Heart to God at the first Approach of the Temptation? Whether Sloth hinder'd him not from kneeling down, and lifting up his Hands to Heaven, when he had the Opportunity to do it? Whether his daily Task of Prayer has been never neglected? Finally, Whether his Heart has performed its Duty as well as his Tongue? For these Enquiries will lead him to the true Source of his Failing, and convince him that he has not obtained, because he has not ask'd as he ought.

Let us then resolve to be constant in performing this great Duty; let no Morning or Evening pass without allowing our Souls a sufficient Portion of this spiritual Nourishment. They both need, and certainly deserve this Care, as well as our Bodies: For, do what we can to preserve our Bodies, they must sooner or later return to Dust; but the noblest Part, our Souls, must be nourished for Eternity.

'Tis true, indispensable Business may sometimes be a lawful Hindrance; but we must take care it be not the Pretence, when Sloth is the real Cause of it. If the Concern for our Souls be as it ought, we shall easily forecast Things so, that tempo-

ral Affairs will seldom interfere with our Duty to God : For where there is a real and hearty Concern for any Thing, it suggests a thousand Expedients, which Coldness and Indifference will easily overlook. We may perhaps imagine a Neglect of this Nature to be of little or no Consequence. 'Tis certain, however, that when it is often repeated, and proceeds from Coldness and Sloth, 'tis not so trivial a Matter as some take it to be ; but, on the contrary, both very displeasing to God, and dangerous in its Consequence.

The XXXth ENTERTAINMENT.

The principal Conditions of Prayer.

Ye ask, and ye receive not, because ye ask amiss. James iv. 3.

HAVING now shewed the Necessity and Efficacy of Prayer, the Conditions, which ought to attend it, offer themselves next. These therefore shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

A Christian, in Time of Prayer, ought to consider himself as a Criminal, that comes to throw himself at the Feet of his offended Sovereign, and implore his Mercy : For what are we, in Effect, but Criminals,

minals, that have offended the infinite Majesty of God? What are we, but rebellious Subjects, who have lifted up our Hands against our Divine Sovereign, and depend wholly on his Mercy for our Deliverance from the Sentence of eternal Death, which our Sins have deserved? Now, if our Hearts were thoroughly penetrated with this Truth, when we come to present ourselves before Almighty God in Prayer, it would inspire us with an awful Respect, and help to keep us within those Bounds of Decency which suit both with our Condition, and the Business we are about.

Our Condition, as I have said, is that of Criminals; and our Business, in Time of Prayer, is to implore God's Mercy: We ought therefore to appear before him in the Posture of Criminals, that is, in the most submissive and respectful Manner possible; and be careful to avoid whatever carries with it an Air of Vanity and Presumption. The Humility of our Hearts ought to manifest itself in the Humiliation of our Bodies, and our very Looks and Postures ought to act the Part of Supplicants as well as our Tongues.

However, I mean not here to encourage Singularity, or Affectation; in which Vanity and Hypocrisy have usually a greater Share than Devotion. There are some,

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who, with their Groans, or the Loudness of their Prayers, disturb all that are near them, or draw their Eyes upon them by certain Actions or Gestures, fitter for a private Oratory than a publick Assembly: These are apt to delude themselves, and imagine they are truly humble, because they are so in Appearance. True Devotion is hearty and earnest, but not noisy; it has a Regard to Decency, but avoids Ostentation and Shew; finally, it seeks to edify, but begs not the Applause or Esteem of Men.

There is therefore, a Mean between over-acting Devotion, and shewing no Devotion at all; and our Behaviour, especially in Time of publick Prayer, ought to be so regulated between these two Extremes, as to be free from all Appearance of Affectation on the one Hand, and edify by all the Marks of a solid Piety on the other: For tho' the Devotion of the Heart be a Tribute we owe to God alone, yet that exterior Devotion, which consists in a respectful Composure of the Body, is a Duty we owe both to God and our Neighbour; and no Man whatsoever, unless disabled by Sicknes or Infirmary, is exempt from the Obligation of it; because no Person in the World is too great to serve God with Decency, or appear before him
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in an humble Manner: Nay, the greater a Man's Condition is, the more he is obliged to it, in Relation both to God and Man; in Relation to God, because being particularly indebted to him for the temporal Advantages he enjoys above others, he is bound in Gratitude to appear more zealous in his Service; as those that are greatest at Court are bound to espouse the Honour and Interest of their Prince with greatest Zeal: They are also under a stricter Obligation with Regard to Men; because having more the Eyes of Men upon them, and whatever they do being of a much more powerful Influence than the Actions of those that move in a lower Sphere, they have it in their Power either to promote the Decency of God's Service, by recommending it to others by their Examples, or to bring it into Contempt, by shewing a Contempt of it in their Practice.

'Tis true, the outward Posture of the Body is not of itself essential in the Duty of Prayer; for a Man may pray sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, as well as kneeling: A Traveller may pray upon the Road, a Tradesman in his Shop, a Plowman in the Field, and a sick Man stretch'd out upon his Bed; but there is a Difference between what Necessity imposes, and that which is the Effect of Vanity, In-

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difference, and Sloth : So that the Disposition of the Heart is usually manifested by the outward Posture of the Body, when a Person has it in his Choice. Thus wandering Looks are a Symptom of a dissipated Mind : Affecting certain Airs in the Church betrays a Vanity not suiting with the Disposition of a Suppliant, or a Heart humbled before Almighty God : Finally, loolling in a lazy Posture, or kneeling on one Kneè, when all Knees ought to be bent, to adore *Jesus Christ* present on the Altar, is an Undecency, which plainly shews not only a Want of Devotion, but a Deadness of Faith, and furnishes the Enemies of the Church with Arms against us ; it appearing highly improbable, that they, who believe Christ really present, should behave themselves disrespectfully before him.

But tho' the outward Decorum or Respect ought to be carefully observed in Time of Prayer, the inward Attention of the Mind is of much greater Importance ; because, if this be wilfully wanting, our Prayer is defective in its very Substance : For what is Prayer but the Elevation or Raising of the Mind to God ? When therefore the Mind is not raised to God, but either kept down with the Weight of earthly Cares, or distracted with frivolous Amuse-

Amusements, the Consequence is, that there is no Prayer: Again, what is properly vocal Prayer, but the Desires of the Heart expressed in Words? For the Tongue is but the Interpreter of the Heart; and Words are designed for no other Use than to signify what passes within the Mind: If therefore they have no Connection with our Thoughts, they are in themselves no more than empty Sounds, and a mere Lip-labour, which God has no Regard to. 'Tis the Prayer of the Heart, as I have already said, that moves the Divine Bowels to Compassion: 'Tis the Prayer of the Heart that mounts like Incense up to Heaven, and brings down the promised Blessings to us. So that if the Heart prays not, the Motion of the Lips and Tongue, tho' never so busily employ'd, can no more properly be called Prayer, than such a Number of Words repeated by a Man out of his Senses.

Let no Man therefore flatter himself that he has prayed much, because he has recited a great Number of Prayers, unless he be sure his Heart has performed its Part as well as his Tongue; for tho' our Lips move without Interruption, our Prayer is interrupted, as often as we deliberately interrupt our Attention, which is the Life and Soul of Prayer: But when the Heart,

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in Time of Prayer, is not only taken up with Amusements, that are indifferent in themselves, but consenting to some sinful Passion, or meditating some unlawful Design, then it becomes that Sort of Prayer which the Scripture pronounces abominable in the Sight of God.

However, I speak only of Distractions that are voluntary, and every one must be his own Judge how far he is guilty of them; for as to those that are involuntary, and pass without Reflection, it is certain they are no Prejudice either to the Merit or Efficacy of Prayer, provided there be no Negligence on our Side: And 'tis no less certain, that in our State of natural Weakness, in which we are not Masters of our Imaginations, it is humanly impossible we should be wholly free from them: So that all we have to do, is to use reasonable Endeavours, that we neither occasion them by a wilful previous Neglect, nor entertain them with Reflection, when they obtrude themselves upon us. When we have secured these two Points (which, however, ought to be done without an over-scrupulous Solitude, or putting our Consciences upon the Rack about it; so that, if we doubt whether we have entertained them with Reflection or not, we ought to judge in Favour of ourselves; it being

being morally impossible to have a full Reflection without knowing it.) When, I say, we have secured these two Points by a moderate Care, we ought to look upon Distractions, how frequent soever, as Temptations not consented to, and ourselves as mere Sufferers in them; nor draw any Consequence from them, to discourage us from a chearful *Perseverance* in this holy Exercise: Which is the third Condition necessary to render our Prayers effectual and acceptable in the Sight of God.

This Condition is plainly marked out to us by Christ himself, in the 11th Chapter of St. *Luke*; where he proposes the Parable of a Man, who coming to his Friend by Night to borrow some Loaves of him, is at first refused; but continuing to beg, and knock at his Door, obtains at length his Request, by his Importunity and Perseverance: And, tho' the Application of the Parable be clear, our Saviour himself was pleased to make it in these remarkable Words: *I also say unto you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you: For whoever asks, shall receive; and he who seeks, shall find; and it shall be opened to him that knocks.* These are Christ's own Words, which, as they plainly teach us that Perseverance is a Condition

of Prayer, so they encourage us to the Practice of it, by shewing its Power and Efficacy, and representing its Fruit and Success, as owing to it. The same is likewise marked out in the Prayer of the *Cananean* Woman, who overcame Christ by her Importunity, and forced him, as it were, to grant to her Perseverance, what he had denied to her first Prayer.

However, to be rightly understood, I mean not by Perseverance in Prayer, a daily Continuance of it for many Hours together, or that our Prayers are to take up the greatest Part of each Day ; for this is too violent to hold ; and Experience has afforded but too many Instances, that grasping at too much often ends in doing nothing at all. A Traveller, that has a long Journey to make, is in Danger of fainting, or stopping short by the Way, if he overstrains himself at first ; and a constant moderate Pace will sooner bring him to his Journey's End, than running himself out of Breath by Fits and Starts. And so it is in the Practice of Devotion : We have perhaps a long Journey to go ; if therefore we overstrain our Devotion, we shall run it out of Breath before we get half Way. This has been seen in many indiscreet Devotees, who, measuring their Strength by their own Vanity and Presumption,

sumption, neglected the Rules of Moderation; and, in Process of Time, finding themselves over-charged, grew weary of the Burden, threw off the Yoke that galled them, and ran insensibly into the opposite Extreme.

'Tis certain, that a Surfeit of Devotion is as dangerous to the Soul, as that of Meat is to the Body; when we are once cloy'd with it, the Appetite is ever after set against it, and 'tis hard to come again to relish it, even in a moderate Way: So that the Rule of praying ought, in a great Measure, to be the same as that of eating: We must take daily enough of it to nourish our Souls; but we should usually rise from Prayer, as from Table, with an Appetite: This will make us more willing to come to it again the next Day; and the same Practice being repeated every Day, our Devotion will become uniform and regular. And 'tis this I mean by Perseverance in Prayer, and recommend as a Point of the greatest Importance, and an assured Means to obtain daily the Measure of Grace we stand in Need of, for the Support and Nourishment of our spiritual Life.

I suppose then, that every Christian, who has a Concern for his Soul, will oblige himself, by the Advice of his Director, to

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some regular Devotion suited to the Circumstances he lives in. As to those that are engaged in a religious State, they have their Path marked out before them, which, if they but follow, they cannot go astray : It will certainly lead them to a happy End, if they never go out of it ; and the only Advice I have to give them is, never to amuse themselves with particular private Devotions, till they find they are every Day exact and punctual in practising those that are prescribed them by the Constitutions of the House they live in. This is properly the Uniformity and Perseverance in Prayer suited to their State, which nothing but Sickneſs, or Obedience to the Orders of Superiors, ought ever to interrupt : This is the Perseverance which will render their Prayers efficacious, and draw down the Blessing of Heaven upon them.

But as to those that live in the World, they being under no Constraint of Rule or Vows, are free to choose that Method of Devotion which suits best with their Circumstances : But when their Choice is once well made, they ought not easily to change it ; because this leads to Fickleness and Inconstancy, which is the Bane of Perseverance, and the most dangerous Enemy it has to struggle with ; for Nature seeks Change and Variety in every Thing, even
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in Pleasures : So that Pleasures themselves, if not seasoned with Variety, become tedious, and we grow weary of them. This is certainly a great Weakness in human Nature, and 'tis that Weakness which we call *Inconstancy* : But if this prevails upon us even in Things that are of themselves agreeable and pleasing, 'tis easy to judge what Strength and Resolution we stand in Need of, to bear up against it in the Practice of Duties, to which we have a natural Repugnance. So that whoever resolves seriously to be perseverant and uniform in the Duty of Prayer, must be prepared for this Combat against himself, that is, against his own natural *Inconstancy* : He must not be surprised to find a Repugnance to do the same Thing every Day, nor discouraged if this Repugnance grows violent upon him ; for if he lets himself be overcome by it, he is in Danger of losing all the Fruits of his past Devotions ; but if he yield not to it, he may justly regard it as a Trial of his Virtue, which will not lessen but increase the Merit and Efficacy of his Prayer.

Prayer is a Duty, and since every Duty is a kind of Clog and Constraint upon human Nature, it is no Wonder the Practice of it should not be attended with any sensible Satisfaction. This is indeed sometimes

times the Reward of Prayer, but never a Quality or Attribute belonging to the Nature of it: So that we are not bound to pray with *Pleasure*; but we are bound to pray with *Perseverance*, whether we find a Pleasure or Disgust in it, whether an Inclination or Repugnance to it: This is precisely our Duty; this God requires of us, and will reward with a plentiful Blessing, if we be faithful in the Discharge of it.

But besides the Temptation of *Inconstancy*, which we shall always have to struggle with in this holy Exercise, we must also arm ourselves against that of *Despondency*. We are naturally impatient in all our Desires, and instead of waiting with an humble Submission for the Will of God, we would have it at a Beck or Call. If the Fruit of our Prayers answers not immediately our Expectations, we fall into Dejection, and are ready to consult our Ease rather than continue an Exercise, which we begin to regard as a fruitless Labour. This was not the Practice of the *Royal Prophet*, who says thus of himself, *expecting, I expected the Lord*: Which Repetition of the same Word is an *Hebraism*, importing a long and patient Perseverance in waiting for the Will and Pleasure of Almighty God: And what was the Effect
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of it? He tells us in these following Words, *and be listened to me and heard my Prayers.* The Prophet *Isaias* exhorts us to do the same, and promises the same Success? *if the Lord* (says he) *makes Delay, wait for him: For he will certainly come, and he will not tarry.*

It becomes not Sinners to stand upon Terms with their offended God, or pretend to set him the Time of his Mercies. 'Tis our Business to do our Duty in Hopes of obtaining at length the Blessing we pray for, and resist with an unwearied Perseverance all discouraging Suggestions, as Snares laid for us by the Enemy of our Souls. This is the Method of the Children of this World, in their temporal Concerns: They are indefatigable in following their Suits, soliciting their Lawyers, appealing from one Court to another; and are thought happy, if they obtain at last a favourable Decree, tho' purchased with incredible Pains and Cost. And this ought also to be our Method in the Business of Salvation; and particularly of those, who labour under more than ordinary Difficulties: They must be indefatigable in pursuing their Point, never weary of soliciting Heaven, never discouraged at seeming Disappointments: If they leave off praying, they give up the Cause for lost;

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lost; but if they persist in it with an unwearied Patience and Perseverance; they have solid Grounds to hope a happy Issue, and that God will take his Time to cast a favourable Regard upon them. Their very Perseverance in Prayer is a Fruit of their Prayer, and a Pledge of future Mercies in store: For Almighty God, who is infinitely Good and Merciful, bestows not his Favours by halves, and when he gives the Grace of Perseverance in Prayer, 'tis a Mark, he designs to give much more, and reward those happy Dispositions, his Grace has already form'd, by granting not only what we have so long pray'd for, but Favours that surpass our highest Desires.

Thus then we see the principal Conditions requisite to render our Prayers effectual, and the true Meaning of this Promise of Christ, *Ask, and ye shall receive. Ask,* that is, pray with *Humility* and *Respect*, pray with the *Heart* as well as the *Tongue*, pray with *Perseverance*, and ye will certainly receive. For it is an undoubted Truth, that Christ will not be wanting to his Promise, if we be not wanting to our Duty; and that if *we pray and receive not*, the true and only Reason is, *because we pray amiss.*

The

THE XXXIst ENTERTAINMENT.

The End or Intention of Prayer.

*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss,
that ye may consume it upon your Lusts.*
James iv. 3.

THE latter Part of this Text, discovers a considerable Irregularity, relating to the *Intention* or principal *End* of Prayer. And tho' I can scarce suspect any Christians so corrupt, as to pray for Things with an express Intention to be furnished with Means to satisfy their Lusts, yet it is not to be doubted, but that Almighty God, who is the Searcher of Hearts, sees them often so disposed, that if he should grant them the temporal Blessings they pray for, they would most certainly abuse them to their own eternal Ruin, by employing them in the Gratification of such Passions as have the greatest Ascendant over them.

This obliges me to give some Directions concerning the general End or Intention of Prayer, especially when any temporal Concern is the immediate Subject of it. For when we pray for spiritual Things, which
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in their own Nature have a Relation to the Good of our Souls, our Prayers cannot be displeasing to God, provided they want not any of the Conditions I have already spoken of in my last Discourse; But when some temporal Blessing is the immediate Subject of our Prayers, there is always some Danger of swerving from the Intention, by which they ought to be directed; and so they may be either pleasing or displeasing to God, according to the End we have principally in View: Some Directions then relating to this End, shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

All moral Actions have a Tendency to some principal End, which we call the Motive or Intention, for which we act; and 'tis this End, that makes them either good or bad: But with this Difference, that Actions which are bad in themselves, can never become good by being done for a good End: Whereas those that of themselves are indifferent or virtuous, become absolutely good or bad from the principal End or Motive we propose to ourselves in the doing of them. Prayer (for Example) is of itself a religious Duty; yet if the Motive of our Praying be to get the Esteem and Applause of Men, instead of being devout we become Hypocrites, and shall receive our Reward with the *Pharisees*, who stood
praying.

praying at the Corners of Streets, that they might be seen by Men.

In like manner, if the principal End of our Prayer be the obtaining of some temporal Good, and stops there, I may properly call it a meer interested and selfish Devotion, prompted by, and wholly tending to gratify Self-love. Not that we are forbid to pray for temporal Things: For *Christ* himself has taught us to ask our *daily Bread*, and to pray *to be delivered from Evil*: And the Practice of the Church encourages it, by ordaining publick Prayers to avert or prevent publick Calamities. But in praying for temporal Things we must have a farther View, and whilst these are the immediate Subject of our Petitions, they must be refer'd to a nobler End, and regarded only as Means subservient to it.

If you ask me what this End is, I answer, that it is no other than God's Glory, and the Good of our Souls. The Reason is, because as Almighty God, to whom our Prayers are address'd, is a pure Spirit, so the principal End of our Prayers ought to be purely spiritual; and as God bestows upon us his temporal Blessings, not for their own Sake, but to serve us as Means and Instruments of Salvation; so we must ask them with the same Intention: If this be
wanting,

wanting, our Prayers are unworthy to be presented to, and accepted by Almighty God; as not being conformable to that End, to which all Things in this World are ordained by their great Maker, and which alone, deserves to be regarded by him.

Thus when we pray for Health, our End must be to employ it in God's Service: If the Subject of our Prayer be to beg reasonable Conveniences of human Life, we must at the same Time have a better Life in View; and desire the Helps and Comforts of the one, only as Means to forward us on in our Journey to the other: Finally, if we importune Almighty God to deliver us from Evils that oppress us, or Dangers that threaten us, Heaven and the good of our Souls must still preponderate in our Hearts. This must be our chief Concern, this regarded as our principal Interest, and all other Things with Subordination to it. Whoever prays with this Disposition, is sure to be heard; that is to say, is sure not to be disappointed in the principal End of his Prayer, though he obtains not the temporal Good he prays for: But he who prays without this Disposition, is either not regarded, or if he obtains the Thing he asks, 'tis a Token of God's Anger, rather than his Mercy towards him.

This

This is St. *Austin's* Doctrine, who delivers it in these remarkable Words. *Quædam*, says he, *negat propitius Deus, quæ concedit iratus*, that is, *God refuses some Things, when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry.* He refuses them, when he is propitious, because he knows they will be hurtful to us: And he grants them, when he is angry, because he foresees they will become our Scourges, or by our Abuse of them, be the Occasion of our future Ruin. What a Comfort is this for those, who wait with Patience for the Will of God, even when their Prayers are seemingly unregarded? And how ought it to check the Impetuosity of our Desires, when they are ready to mutiny against Heaven, because they are not gratified in the very Way they ask for?

When the Sons of *Zebidè* engaged their Mother to ask of Christ, that *one of them might sit at his right, the other at his left Hand in his Kingdom*, he check'd their ambitious Requests, with this Answer, *ye know not what ye ask*: And this is literally true, whenever we pray for any temporal Concern: We truly know not, what we ask; because we know not, whether it will promote or hinder our Salvation: We know not whether it will draw God's Blessings, or his Malediction upon us. And if then,

in this Case, instead of an *angry Grant*, he sends us back with a *propitious Refusal*, have we not Reason to sit down content, and bless his infinite Goodness for having had more Regard to our real Interest, than the Irregularity of our Desires? Are we not ungrateful to God, and unjust to ourselves, when upon any Disappointment, we lash out into Murmurs and Complaints, and are ready to accuse Providence of Partiality, in the Distribution of his temporal Blessings?

But, Almighty God regards these Complaints as the Tears of senseless Children; and, as he best knows what is expedient or necessary for us, so he has also a truer Love for us than we have for ourselves. *A loving Father*, says Christ, *gives not his Child a Serpent for a Fish, nor reaches him out a Scorpion for an Egg*. We often indeed act the Part of senseless Children; we cry out for the *Serpent*, imagining it to be a *Fish*, and reach our Hands out greedily at the *Scorpion*, mistaking it for an *Egg*: But our heavenly Father shews himself a Father indeed, and pitying our childish Mistakes, is deaf to our Cries, and refuses us the Trifles we ask to our Prejudice, to bestow real and solid Goods upon us; unless perhaps, provoked by our Impatience and Murmurs, he lays aside the Tenderness of a Father, lets us have our Wills, and leaves us to smart

smart under the just Punishment of our rebellious Lusts.

We have a Figure of this Truth in the Person of *Rachel*. She had been barren for several Years ; which in the Time of the old Law, was look'd upon as a great Disgrace : But, she bore her Affliction so impatiently, and her Desire of being delivered from it was so immoderate, that she declared she should die with Grief, if she were not blessed with Children : *Give me Children, or else I die*, was her Prayer. At length she had Children given her, and died in a painful Labour ; so that what she had begged with so much Impatience, as the only Means to save her Life, became, by a just Disposition of Providence, the Occasion of her Death.

And, how many Parents have also too eagerly importuned Almighty God for the Blessing of the Marriage-bed, and found it afterwards the greatest Cross of their old Age ? How many afflicted with Sicknes, in which they might have sanctified their Souls, have impatiently beg'd for Health ; but when they enjoy'd it, abus'd the Benefit against their Benefactor, and turn'd Reprobates ? How many in fine, have pray'd for Riches, which, if not abus'd by themselves, were, by their Children made the support of their Extravagances, or an Oc-
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casion of endless Broils ? And how happy had these Persons been, had Almighty God been propitiously deaf to their Prayers ? Had he mercifully refused to hearken to their inordinate Requests, which he granted in his Anger to punish them with those very Things, which they asked undoubtedly without any Regard to the End, they ought principally to have proposed to themselves.

This Truth is confirmed by a terrible Example related in the 11th Chapter of the Book of *Numbers*. It tells us, that the *Israelites* in the Desert, being weary of eating nothing but *Manna*, began to murmur, and cry out for Flesh ; and thereupon importuned *Moses* to intercede for them to God, to grant them their Desire. *Moses*, though sensible of the Unreasonableness, and apprehensive of the dangerous Consequence of it, yielded to their Importunity, and address'd himself to God in their behalf : But the Scripture says, his Wrath was highly kindled against them : And who would have expected any Thing here but a flat Denial ? But, it happened quite otherwise ; God told *Moses* that since the *Israelites* had cry'd out for Flesh, they should have it ; and thereupon caused a Wind to blow such a number of Quails into their Camp, as was sufficient for the whole

whole Multitude; who fell immediately upon their Prey, and thought themselves happy in having obtained what they had long'd for; but it cost them very dear: For the Meat was yet betwixt their Teeth, as the Scripture expresses it, and the Wrath of God fell upon them, and destroy'd many Thousands of them upon the Place; which from that Time was called *the Sepulchre of inordinate Lust*: Because the *Israelites* had there inordinately lusted after Flesh.

This Example shews how dangerous it is, either to repine inordinately under the Condition God's Providence has allotted to us, or importune him for temporal Blessings without an absolute Submission to his holy Will and Pleasure. 'Tis also a convincing Proof of what St. *Austin* has told us, that *God denies some Things when he is propitious, which he grants when he is angry*. And so we see, that wicked Men are generally more successful in compassing their Ends, than devout and virtuous Christians. Because the Children of this World are permitted to enjoy this World, and have their Wills gratified now, but their Punishment is to come hereafter: Whereas the Just being considered by Almighty God as his own Children, he refuses to put those Things into their Hands, which may
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be an Obstacle to the eternal Happiness, he has prepared for them.

Thus it often happens, that a virtuous Christian being much afflicted with Sickness prays to God for Health, and he hears him not, because he foresees that if he had his Health he would abuse it : Another labours under great Want, and petitions earnestly for Relief ; but God is deaf to his Prayers, because he knows the Poverty he suffers is more conducing to his Salvation, than the Relief he prays for : A third is eagerly bent upon some worldly Business, in the Success whereof he promises much Happiness and Satisfaction to himself. But Almighty God foresees, that what he pursues as a Means to make him happy, will prove the Occasion of his Ruin ; and therefore, has no Regard to his mistaken Prayer, but lets all Things fall out cross to his Desires. In all which cases, what appears to us a Refusal, is a real Grant of greater Favours than those we sue for, though not so pleasing to our Inclinations ; however, like Children, when crossed in their Wills, we are apt to break out into complaints, as if we had received hard Measure : - And, if God bore not with this our Weakness, but dealt with us as he did with the *Israelites* in the Desert by gratifying our Desires, we should like them find but too soon the Effects

fects of an *angry Grant*, and wish too late, to have been favour'd with a *propitious Refusal*.

To come now to a Conclusion, the principal Fruit we must draw from this Discourse, is a firm Resolution to make the Will of God the sole Rule and Measure of all our Desires : And what is the undoubted Will of God, but that in every Thing we pray for, we should consult above all, his Honour, and the Good of our Souls ? This is plainly taught us both by the *Preface*, and very Order of the Petitions in our *Lord's Prayer*, which is the Pattern of all other Prayers ; and in effect, all other Prayers offered to Almighty God, are but a Paraphrase upon it. We are taught then by its *Preface* to address ourselves to God as our *heavenly Father* ; to put us in Mind, that being his Children we must have a Zeal for his Honour, seek to inherit the Kingdom he has prepared for us, and be governed by him rather than our own Wills and Desires : And therefore these three Petitions, 1, *Hallowed be thy Name*, 2, *Thy Kingdom come*, 3, *Thy Will be done*, have the first Rank, and are placed at the Head of all the rest ; to mark out to us, that they must over-rule all our other Prayers, and be as settled Principles and Maxims presupposed to, and implied in every Thing we ask.

Tom. II.

I

Whoever

Whoever prays for any temporal Concern with these previous Dispositions, will find the Fruit of them in a solid Peace and Tranquillity of Mind; whether he meets with a Grant or Refusal of the Thing he prays for.

I will instance in the particular Case of Sickness; and address myself to those, who are much afflicted with it, and pray for Health. I ask them precisely upon what Terms they pray for it? And whether they desire their Recovery, whether it be or be not pleasing to God? Whether it be for the Good or Prejudice of their Souls? If they be disposed as the *Israelites* were in the Desert, they will answer that they will put that to the Hazard; that their Business is to have Health, no matter how. Perhaps they will not speak so plain: But if they be so disposed at Heart, which is all one, 'tis no Wonder if they be impatient and fretful, and ready to murmur against God, when their Desires are not gratified. And all I have to say to them, is to wish them a better Disposition, and that God instead of giving them Health, will mercifully turn their Hearts, and make them become better Christians.

But, if on the contrary, they answer from the Bottom of their Hearts, that they would chuse to suffer the most painful Sickness

ness, even to their last Breath, rather than ask any Thing that should be displeasing to God, or prejudicial to their Souls : Oh ! then let them pray on with these happy Dispositions, and employ all natural Means ordain'd by Providence for their Recovery, though both the one and the other should prove ineffectual ; because they are sure not to be disappointed in the main End of their Prayer. 'Tis true, they pray for Health, and obtain it not ; but they pray not absolutely for it, but only upon this Condition, if it be God's holy Will and Pleasure. So that the principal Subject of their Prayer is, that the Will of God be accomplished : When therefore the Event has manifested, that it is God's Will that their Sicknes should continue, have they not obtained the principal End of their Desire ? And they will certainly acquiesce to it with an entire Repose of Mind, if their Prayer was sincere : For if they pay not a hearty Submission to it, but appear dissatisfied with the Event, and repine under the Weight of their Cross, 'tis a Mark, that when their Tongues pronounced these Words, *thy Will be done*, their Hearts spoke another Language : For it is a Contradiction to seek the Will of God sincerely, and not submit to it, when it has manifested itself in the Event.

However, this hinders not the giving Grains of Allowance to Nature. A good Christian is as sensible of Pain as a bad one; and a Fit of the Gout, Stone, or Cholick will force Complaints from the one as well as the other. But place before a good Christian, his Ease on the one Hand, and the Will of God in Opposition to it on the other, and bid him take his Choice; and he will certainly prefer God's Will before his own Ease: And 'tis precisely in this Preference that the Heart speaks, gives the Law to all irregular Desires of Nature, and finds a solid Peace under the most acute Pains of the Body. This is that Peace, which the Apostle recommended to the primitive Christians for the *Guard of their Hearts and Intellects*; which the Martyrs found amidst the bitterest Torments; which nothing but a hearty Submission to the Will of God can procure us; which finally, is the greatest Blessing of this Life, and a Pledge of future Happiness; which God through his infinite Goodness grant us all, *Amen.*

The

The XXXIId ENTERTAINMENT.

For the Beginning of the New-Year.

Jesus encreased in Wisdom, Age, and Grace.
Luke ii. 52.

THE Gospel, from whence these Words are taken, is yearly read to us at our very Entrance into the new-Year; because it places an Example before us, which ought to direct us in all the several Stages of Life: For, whatever Concerns a Man may otherwise have upon his Hands, the principal Business of a Christian is to increase in *Grace* and *Virtue*, as he grows up in *Years*. He is a Traveller in this World: Heaven is his Home; his Life is his Journey to it; and the main Business of a Traveller, is to be daily advancing nearer to his Journey's End: So that the Sun should never set upon him without finding him as many Steps nearer Heaven, as it finds him nearer to his Grave.

Here then let us consider, whether we have hitherto been directed by this great Rule. Are we already as much advanced in Virtue as we are in Age? Have we gain'd Ground upon our corrupt Inclinations

tions proportionably to the Steps we have already made towards our Graves? Has every Year made some considerable Change to the better? And do we find ourselves as much better, as we are now older than we were last Year, or the Year before, or some Years ago? Alas! How is it to be fear'd, there are but few who can, without wronging Truth, give this Account of themselves! How is it to be fear'd, that but too many, upon an impartial Review of themselves, will find they have rather lost than gain'd Ground! And what will be the End at long Run? What will become of us, if we thus continue from Year to Year, under the same sinful Habits? If the End of every Year finds us either worse, or nothing better than it left us in the Beginning? Must not such a Course as this terminate in our everlasting Ruin?

That therefore we may become thoroughly sensible of the Danger, that threatens all delaying Sinners, and by Consequence, of the Necessity of taking up in Time, and beginning a new Life with the new Year we are now entered into, I have made Choice of an easy and familiar Truth, to convince all Persons, conscious to themselves of being in an unsafe or dangerous Way, that their eternal Lot, may, perhaps, depend upon the Measures they take this very Year.

Year. The Truth then I mean to offer to their most serious Consideration, and which shall make the whole Subject of this Entertainment, is this, *viz.* that this very Year may be design'd by Almighty God, to put a Period to their Lives, and be the last they are ever like to see.

That the Year we are now entered into, may be the last of our Lives, is a Truth so certain, that nothing but a Presumption even to a Degree of Madness, can incline us to entertain the least Doubt of it : And therefore it stands not so much in Need of Proofs to convince the Judgment, as of a serious Meditation to imprint it in our Hearts. 'Tis certain, we are not Masters of our own Lives, nor is any Man privileged even to know, much less to carve for himself the Portion of Life he is to enjoy. We are but Tenants at Pleasure ; and God alone, of whom we hold our Being, who has hitherto preserved it, and will one Day put a Period to all Time ; He alone, I say, has the Power of Life and Death in his own Hands, and measures out to every one the Number of their Days according to his Will and Pleasure.

Whence it evidently follows, that since no Man can positively promise himself even one single Day or Hour, much less can he pretend to an infallible Assurance of out-

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living the Year we have now before us. Youth cannot secure any one of it, since many Thousands are yearly nipped in the very Bud, or cut off in the Flower of their Age: Neither can our being now in perfect Health, or the particular Advantage of a good Habit of Body, insure our Lives for any Length of Time; because we find, by doleful Experience, that there is many Times scarce one Hour's Space between the most perfect Health, and a mortal Distemper, under which the very strongest Constitution cannot hold out for many Days: To say nothing of violent Deaths, occasion'd by Accidents, against which no Precautions can shelter us, and to which both young and old, weak and strong, infirm and healthful Constitutions are equally exposed.

How many in the World are now actually upon their Death-beds, and expecting hourly their Summons before the Tribunal of God, who but a few Days ago were as likely to live as any of us? Nay, how many are now dead, and cold in their Graves, and already become the Food of Worms, who perhaps but some few Months or Weeks ago had as good a Prospect of a longer Life before them, and as fair Hopes of surviving those they have left behind, as the very youngest and most health-

healthful of this Assembly? What Reason then have we to promise ourselves another Year, more than they seemed to have, so small a Time before they were taken out of this World? Are our Lives any Thing better insured? Or are we not liable to the very same Accidents, which so soon blasted all their flattering Hopes of a long Life? And why then may not their Case happen to be ours, before another Twelve-month goes round? Why may not this Year put a Period to our Lives, as well as the last Year made an End of theirs? Our Bodies are made of the same Clay, our Lives hang by as slender a Thread, and are exposed to all the same Hazards, either of a violent or natural Death, as theirs were.

Add to this, that as the last Year has sent many Thousands to the other World, who, at the Beginning of it, were as likely to live as any of us; so nothing is more certain, than that many Thousands more, even within the Precincts of this Island, will never see the End of this Year: And who can assure any of us, that it will not fall to his Share to be of the Number? What Reason have we to promise ourselves a Privilege above any of our Fellow-mortals? 'Tis true, the Matter being doubtful and uncertain, it is not at all unreasonable to hope the best: But since it is doubtful,

it is also a great Folly not to fear the worst, and downright Madness not to provide against it. The very Possibility of it, considering how great a Concern is at a Stake, is Motive enough to make us as effectually resolve upon all the necessary Preparations for it, as if we had an infallible Assurance that it would happen to us.

But, alas! there is more than a bare Possibility in the Case. The many Dangers we are exposed to within the Compass of a Year, what of a violent Death on the one hand, or a natural one on the other, make it more than barely possible, and give sufficient Grounds for a reasonable Apprehension of it, and the necessary Precautions against it: For let us but consider how many unforeseen, and altogether unavoidable Accidents may happen in much less Time than the Compass of a Twelve-month. May not the Slip of a Foot, the Stroke or Fall of a Horse, a violent Cold, a malignant Fever, or Apoplectick Fit, make an End of us in a very short Warning? And are we not continually liable to some of these Misfortunes? But suppose Almighty God should visit us with a Plague, (the Case is not impossible) or any other Epidemical Distemper that is mortal, as we know not but he may, who is there, in this Case, secure of his Life, even for one single Day?

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So that you see our not out-living this Year, is not a mere imaginary Supposition, without Ground or Reason : But the Hazard of it is great enough to oblige any one, who truly tenders his Soul's Salvation, to resolve, without Delay, upon such Measures as may put him into the Condition he would be found in, whenever it shall please Almighty God to call upon him.

Oh ! how many miserable Souls are now burning in unquenchable Flames, who might have been happy Souls in Heaven, had they but taken this Course a Year ago ! Many were perhaps exhorted to it, and forewarned of the Danger that threaten'd them, just as you now are ; but presuming they had still Time enough before them, and thereupon neglecting the Summons of the Divine Mercy, were cut off in the Midst of their Disorders, and when perhaps they looked least for it ; and are now doomed to everlasting Torments : And who can tell, but if, like them, we should continue deaf to the Voice of Mercy calling upon us, Death, the Executioner of God's Justice, may likewise overtake us, when we are least aware of it, and appoint us to receive with them the deserved Reward of our Folly ?

There is a Parable in the 13th Chapter of St. *Luke*, which seems to threaten all
delaying

delaying Sinners with this Misfortune, and suits exactly with the main Subject of this Discourse. Our Saviour proposes it in these Terms: *A certain Man had a Fig-tree planted in his Vineyard, and he came to seek Fruit upon it, and he found none. Then said he to the Dresser of the Vineyard, Behold, these three Years have I sought Fruit on this Fig-tree, and found none: Cut it therefore down; why encumbers it the Earth? But the Dresser of the Vineyard answer'd him; Lord, let it only stand this Year, till I dig about it, and dung it, and perhaps it will bear Fruit; if not, then you may cut it down.*

This is the Parable, and the Moral of it is plain and obvious. The *barren Fig-tree* is a lively Figure of a mere believing Christian; who, tho' he be planted in Christ's Vineyard by Baptism and Faith, and water'd with many Graces and Favours; yet his Faith, being dead and barren, yields no Fruit of good Works: However, Almighty God, the great Master of the Vineyard, looks yearly for Fruit from him; and if, after many Years Expectation, he finds none, he resolves at length to cut him down: But, upon the earnest Supplication of some of his chosen Servants, or the Prayers of his holy Church, the Execution of this dreadful Sentence is deferred

deferred for some Time: A Reprieve is granted him perhaps for another Year, in Hopes of his bearing Fruit: In the mean Time, the Dreſſer of the Vineyard *digs, and lays Dung about him*; that is, uſes all neceſſary Care, either by private Admonitions, or publick Exhortations, to put him in Mind of his mortal Condition, and the Danger of his State: But if, after all Care taken to make him become fruitful, he continues barren as before, as ſoon as the Time of Forbearance is expired, the decreed Sentence of Death, which is but the Fore-runner of a more terrible one, is, without farther Delay, executed upon him.

Now let us apply the whole Parable to ourſelves, and ſee how far we are concerned in every Part of it: And, in the firſt Place, let us, upon a general Review of our Lives paſt, conſider, whether the laſting Barrenneſs of the *Fig-tree* be not a faithful Representation of our unhappy State: For how many Years are now already paſt, ſince we firſt contracted the ſinful Habit, in which we ſtill find ourſelves as deeply engaged as ever? How many Years has our merciful Lord already expected *worthy Fruits of Repentance* from us? And have we hitherto yielded him any Thing but empty Promiſes, fruitleſs Deſires, and Reſolutions without Effect? How juſtly then

then may he make this Complaint of us, *Behold, these ten, twenty, thirty Years, have I sought Fruit on this Fig-tree, and I find none?* And how justly then might he long since have sentenced us to be cut down, and cast into the Fire?

His Patience indeed, and long Forbearance, is nothing less than a Miracle of Goodness: And 'tis not to be doubted, but, unless some favourite Souls had stood in the Gap, and disarmed his Justice, so often provoked by our reiterated Sins; unless the Tears and Prayers of his holy Church had interposed, and obtained from Time to Time a Reprieve for us, in Hopes of our being at length cured of our Barrenness, and yielding him the long-expected Fruit; he had many Years ago ordered the Earth to be cleared of us, as being but so many dead Trunks, which, instead of answering the Ends for which we were planted in his Vineyard, are only an Incumbrance to it, and even apt to infect those that are yet sound, and bear Fruit in due Season.

But since he only forbears the executing of this Sentence upon us, in Expectation of our making good at length our past Deficiency, by a plentiful After-crop of *worthy Fruits* of Repentance; it is certain, his Forbearance will not hold always: Some Year or other will put an End to it, and

and who knows but our Doom may be fixed for this very Year? Who can tell but we may be sentenced to die before we ever see the Beginning of the next New-Year? For, since the Divine Goodness has already forbore so long with us, does not the main Drift of the fore-mentioned Parable give us sufficient Reason to apprehend our Time draws near; and that the Ax is perhaps already laid to the Root to cut us down, unless we prevent the fatal Blow by a speedy Amendment, and worthy Fruits of Repentance?

Here then it will be proper to reflect seriously with ourselves, what has hitherto been the principal Obstacle to our Amendment: For unless this be discovered, and Care taken to remove it, our State will either be always the same; or, instead of mending with Time, we shall only pass from better to worse. Now 'tis unquestionably true, that a long Continuation in Sin is either owing to some outward Cause, or to some wilful Neglect in the Party concerned: If it be occasioned by some outward Cause, every one's own Experience will both give him the surest Information of the true Source of this Weakness, and mark out to him the only Expedient to prevent it for the future; which is, his keeping at the greatest Distance
possible

possible from that Occasion : For, if this be not done, all other Endeavours will signify nothing. He may make the best Resolutions in the World ; but if he loves Danger so, as to expose himself to it without Necessity, he will certainly perish in it ; and the End of the Year will always leave him either worse, or in the same Condition, in which it found him in the Beginning.

But if upon Examination, he finds the chief Obstacle of his Amendment to be within himself ; as that *Idleness* the fruitful Mother of Vice, has the Ascendant over him ; or that an over-Concern for his *worldly Interest*, draws his Heart from God, and the Concerns of a better Life ; or finally, that *Sloth* prevails frequently upon him to neglect the Sacraments, or the Duty of Prayer, which are the ordinary Channels, through which God's Grace is convey'd to our Souls ; and by thus stripping him of his spiritual Armour, lays him open to every Temptation that assaults him : If, I say, he finds any of these to have hitherto obstructed his Amendment of Life ; as these Obstacles are wholly voluntary and within himself, so nothing but a Change of Will vigorously exerting itself in Opposition to them, can possibly remove them ; and unless they be removed, *his State of Weakness* will always continue
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the same, and the Loss of his Soul will be the unavoidable Consequence of it.

If any one tells me that natural Inclination alone, without any previous Neglect on his Side, drags him many Times to Sin : I answer, 1. That no Man can be drag'd so violently as to lose the Power of Resisting ; because his Will is always free ; and there can be no Sin without the free Consent of the Will. I answer, 2dly. That every one concerned, will, upon a strict Examination of himself, find, that either some preceeding Neglect in the Duty of Prayer, or his not having arm'd himself with vigorous Resolutions in the Morning, or a Want of Watchfulness over himself at the first Approach of a Temptation, when it might have easily been check'd, has always been the Forerunner of those Consents, to which he pretends to have been drag'd with a Violence beyond his Power of Resisting. But 3dly, I ask, whether this Pretence is to hold always, or not ? If so, I wish it may not cover a Design never to mend at all : If not, why then will he not resolve to begin out of Hand to oppose an Enemy so powerful already, and who will daily get Ground upon him, if a Stop be not put to it by a vigorous Resistance.

But Time and Age, says the delaying Sinner, weaken all Inclinations ; and then they

they will be easily subdued. This is very true, in those who have always resolutely opposed them : For these usually pass their riper Years in a Triumph rather than Combat. But no Man in the World ever became abler to resist, whilst he held on in a Custom of yielding. Nay, 'tis certain on the contrary, that every sinful Inclination gathers Strength proportionably as it is gratified ; and that Time, which would have weaken'd it had it been resisted, serves but to increase its Power, when it is often yielded to.

But to return to my principal Consideration ; suppose the delaying Sinner be denied that Time or Age, on which he so much depends for the weakening and subduing of his sinful Inclinations : Suppose Death cuts him off, whilst they are yet in their full Strength, and before he has made any serious Efforts towards this great Work : What becomes of him then ? I leave him to reflect upon the Consequences of it : And since he can have no Security that this will not happen to him ; 'tis manifest he cannot answer it, I will not say to God, but even to common Sense and Reason, if he goes on in his usual Delays, on whatever plausible Pretence of present Difficulties they may be grounded : Because whatever his present Difficulties are, Time
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and Delays will but increase them, and remove him at a greater Distance from his Return to God, by the same Steps as they daily bring him nearer to his Grave.

The XXXIII^d ENTERTAINMENT.

All are bound to seek first the Kingdom of God.

*Seek first the Kingdom of God. Matth.
vi. 33.*

THIS Precept is short, but very comprehensive, since it contains the whole Duty of Man. For Man's whole Duty in this Life, is to make God reign sovereignly in his Heart by Grace, in Order to reign hereafter with God in Glory. This, I say, is the whole Duty of Man ; and all the moral Precepts both of the Old and New Testament, are but so many Explanations of the several Branches of it. God commands nothing, but what he knows is necessary to fit us for the Possession of his eternal Kingdom ; and he forbids nothing, but what he knows will be a Hindrance to it. He commands the Practice

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tice of Virtue, because it prepares us for that happy State; and he forbids Vice, because *nothing that is defiled can enter into his Kingdom*: So that the Precept of *seeking first the Kingdom of God*, is a Summary of all Christian Morality; and if we made it but the Rule of all our Actions, it would alone suffice to render us eternally happy.

But, alas! How few are governed by it! How few make Heaven their chief Business, or employ their Time so, as to give sufficient Grounds to judge they prefer the *Kingdom of God*, before the Pleasures or Concerns of this Life! If we consider the State of *Christianity* in general, we shall find it sunk so low, that there will scarce appear any Marks of it left to distinguish it from *Paganism*, besides the bare Name, and some outward Forms, which cost Nothing. We shall find Calumny, Back-biting, Cursing and Swearing, Hatred, Envy, and Revenge, practised amongst the meaner Sort: If we enter into the Shops of Tradesmen, how few shall we find there, who keep their Hands clean from unjust Dealings, and content themselves with a lawful Gain! But if we mount a Step higher, and take a View of those Places, where Justice ought to reign, and Innocence find a *secure Sanctuary*; here we shall see Crimes

of a blacker Die: The Laws perverted, Innocence oppress'd, Justice sold, and Clients ruined instead of finding Relief.

However, Christianity would not groan under so general a Desolation, if it found but a Protection amongst the Nobility and Gentry; who would doubtless be its principal Ornament and Support, if they had a Sense of Gratitude for the temporal Advantages they have received from God. But it is from these, that Christianity has received its most mortal Wound. 'Tis amongst these Vice appears barefaced, and without Restraint. *Religion*, which has some Respect paid it amongst the vulgar Sort, is by Men of Quality treated with Contempt: *Devotion* is a Quality, which many of them are ashamed to own; and *Libertinism*, which carries Infamy with it in another State, lifts up its Head amongst them, with the same Assurance as the most unspotted Virtue. Nay, many will rather boast of Crimes, they never committed, if they be but modish, than blush at those, they are really guilty of.

This is the unhappy State of Christianity in general. The *Kingdom of Satan* has spread itself over the whole Face of the Earth, and Persons of all Conditions flock to it: But the *Kingdom of God* looks like a desert Country, dispeopled, and abandon-
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ed by his Inhabitants. 'Tis true, there are some of all Ranks and States, who like *Lot* and *Noah*, remain untainted amidst the general Corruption of Mankind; are faithful to God's Cause, and labour with a sincere Zeal to establish his Kingdom upon Earth, and secure it to themselves in Heaven. But I fear, that *Lot* and *Noah* are a Figure of their Number, as well as Virtue; which made *Christ* pronounce with a kind of Astonishment this terrible Sentence. *The Way which leads to Life is narrow; and how few find it!* But the Reason why few find it, is because few seek it: Yet all are bound to seek it, even before all other Things; as the Words of my Text expressly declare.

I shall therefore now endeavour to shew, that these Words, *Seek first the Kingdom of God*, contain a Precept of indispensable Obligation; in which all Christians, rich or poor, great or small, Religious or Laicks, are equally concerned: This is the whole Subject of this Entertainment.

To *seek the Kingdom of God*, is the same as to make it our Business to save our Souls; and to *seek it first*, is to make it our chief Business. So that the Point in Question (if it be any) is, whether all Persons, of what Rank or Condition soever, are bound to make the saving their Souls their chief Business, and prefer it to all other Concerns
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of this Life? If Practice were to be consulted in this Case, or the Decision of it depended upon Numbers, it would certainly be carried in the Negative: For the general Practice (as I have already observed) runs violently against it: And to judge by Numbers, we should be forced to conclude, that the Words of my Text contain a *Counsel* rather than *Precept*, and mark out only a securer Way to Heaven; like the Rule of some particular Order, which every Body is not bound to follow. But Numbers and Practice are of no Weight against evident Maxims of Christian Morality. I shall insist upon two, to demonstrate the Matter in Question; tho' it be in a Manner Self-evident, and can scarce be set in a clearer Light, than its own.

The first is, that *All rational Creatures are bound to make it their chief Business to attain the End, for which they are created*: Because to do otherwise, is to set up their own Wills in Opposition to the Will of God: 'Tis to withdraw themselves from the Order of Providence, and frustrate, as far as in them lies, the principal End of their Creation. As to insensible or inanimate Creatures, they are immediately directed to the End of their Creation, by the unerring Hand of Providence, and

and serve as dead Instruments, that never resist the Hand, by which they are employ'd. How happy would Man be, if he did that by Choice, which they do by Impulse or Necessity! For, having received a rational Soul, and, with it, a free Will to choose Good or Evil, he has it in his Power either to tend to, or swerve from the End of his Creation.

But what is this End? Why has God placed him in this World? Was it to make it his Abode for ever? Alas! the Mortality of his Body, and the continual Changes it is subject to, leave no Room for this gross Error; its Term of Life is fixed for a small Number of Years; it falls insensibly into Decay with Age, and Diseases, and so returns into Dust: But Man's better Part his Soul survives for ever: And why has God bestowed upon him this immortal Being? Why has he given him a rational Soul, with his own sacred Image stamped upon it? Was it to enslave her to the Body, and make her an Accomplice in its inordinate Lusts? What an ignoble End is this! How far beneath the Dignity of a spiritual and immortal Being! This therefore cannot be the End of our Creation; and we need to seek no farther for it than in the very Alphabet of Christian Religion; by which we are taught, that the

End

End for which we are created, is to serve God in this Life, in Order to enjoy him eternally in the Life to come. This End is perfectly proportion'd to the Dignity of an intellectual and immortal Being: Because the noblest Employment a Creature can have, is to serve his Creator, and his sovereign Happiness is to enjoy him. The Service of an infinite Majesty is suitable to the Rank of a Creature honour'd with his sacred Image; and a Life of Immortality answers the noblest Ambition of an immortal Soul; nor can he aim at any Thing lower without degrading himself.

We are then created, as you see, for a double End. *viz.* To serve God upon Earth, and to enjoy him in Heaven. The first makes God our *sovereign Lord and Master*; and the second our *sovereign Happiness*. Let us then see, what both the one, and the other obliges us to.

As he is the *Sovereign Lord and Master* of the World, all rational Creatures of what Rank soever are his *Servants*; and all Mankind, in Relation to God, may be consider'd as one Family, whereof he is Head; and in which he has established a Subordination of higher and lower Degrees, and assigned to every one his respective Post for the temporal as well as spiritual Government of it: But he has made some

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general Laws delivered in the *Ten Commandments*, which all are equally bound to obey. In these he has declared his holy Will to all without Exception: By these he has commanded Kings as well as Subjects, rich as well as poor, to own no sovereign Lord and Master but himself; to respect his holy Name; to employ a Day every Week in religious Duties; to honour those that have an Authority over us either by *Nature*, or *divine*, or *human Laws*; finally, not to commit any of those Crimes, which the Law of Nature itself, written in our Hearts before it was engraven in Tables of Stone, forbids: These are the general Laws, by which our heavenly Master commands all his Servants to govern their Lives and Actions, upon Pain of eternal Damnation.

But are these all the Duties he requires of his Servants? I answer, that all particular Duties may be reduced to them, as to their general Heads; and therefore *Christ* being consulted by a young Man, what he was to do to save his Soul, gave him this brief Answer; *Keep the Commandments*. But since they are too short to express all particular Duties, 'tis in this great Family of the Universe, as in all particular Families whereof it is composed: Each Servant has his Station or Post assigned him, which marks

marks out to him his Employment, and the particular Duties annexed to it : Whence arises the Obligation every Christian has, as he is a Servant of God, to regulate his Life and Actions so, that it may be said, he employs his Time, principally at least, in the Service of his heavenly Master. For what is principally the Duty of a Servant ? 'Tis to apply himself to his Master's Business. For, tho' it be indispensably required of him to be trusty, virtuous, and sober ; yet with these good Qualities, he will be a very bad Servant, if he be Slothful, and neglects his Master's Concerns : And so it is with Relation to the Service of God. We are all born his Servants ; and the immediate End of our Creation is, to serve him faithfully upon Earth, according to the respective Station he has placed us in. This is our indispensable Duty ; and a Neglect of it is following our own Wills preferably to the Will of God, and perverting the Order established by Providence.

However, serving God upon Earth is, as I have said, only the immediate End of our Creation ; but the last and principal End of it is, to enjoy God eternally : And these two Ends are subordinate to one another ; because our serving God on Earth, is required as a Means to enjoy him in Heaven. We are therefore born to serve him,

because we are born to enjoy him ; and our enjoying him in Heaven, will be the Reward of our having served him upon Earth ; which made St. *Paul* write these excellent Words, *Whether we live, we live for God ; whether we die, we die for God ; whether we live or die, we belong to God.*

Whence results again the indispensable Obligation all rational Creatures have to make their Salvation, (which is no other than the Possession of God) the principal Business of our Lives. God has made himself our last End : We are therefore bound to regard him as such, in the main Tendency of our Lives and Actions. The Consequence is undeniable ; because a rational Creature cannot act deliberately, but for some last End ; and whatever he makes his last End, he makes his God ; so that if it be not God himself, it is some Creature, which he substitutes in his Place, and prefers before him. For which Reason St. *Paul* sticks not to say, that a *Glutton's Belly is his God*, and he calls *Avarice* the Sin of *Idolatry* ; because Money is the *Idol* of a covetous Man, to which he sacrifices all his Thoughts and Actions. Thus Glory is the *Idol* of Ambition ; and a Man that loves himself to that Degree, *as to consult in every Thing chiefly his own Ease, Interest, or Satisfaction, is properly*

properly said to be his own *Idol*; because whatever he designs or does, is ordained to, and centers in himself.

These therefore make not God their last End, but set up their several Idols in his Place, to which they make a daily Offering of the best Part of their Actions; and so do they, who make not their Salvation the chief Business of their Lives. For how can these say, they make God their last End, since the main Body of their Actions have no Tendency to him? It follows therefore, that they place their last End in something of this World; because since they cannot but act for some last End, if it be not God, it must be some Creature: It follows again, that they live in a continual Contradiction to the Will of God; and such a Contradiction as puts the greatest Affront upon him. He has made them for himself; he has created them to serve and enjoy him. What Honour, what Happiness is this! But they are insensible of both; and refusing to answer these noble Ends, prostitute their Souls to some mean Interest or Pleasure, postpone God to some vile Creature, and place their last Happiness in the Object of their prevailing Passion. This is properly their Crime, who make not their Salvation the chief Business of their Lives. This is the Injustice they become
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guilty of in not *seeking first the Kingdom of God*; which shews plainly, that the Words of my Text contain not a bare *Counsel*, but a *Precept* of the strictest Obligation, in which all Christians are equally concern'd.

But the same is render'd still more evident from a *second* Maxim of the Christian Law: I mean, from the close Connection this Duty has with the Precept of *loving God above all Things*; which *Christ* calls the *first and greatest Commandment of the Law*. This Commandment is indeed of so large an Extent, that all christian Duties are included in it, as Conclusions in their Principle, from which they necessarily flow. But as some Conclusions flow immediately, others more remotely from the same Principle, we may say, that the Duty of *seeking first the Kingdom of God*, is of the former Sort of Conclusions, and has not only a necessary, but immediate Connection with the great Commandment of *loving God above all Things*. In a word, it is so closely interwoven with it, that it is impossible either to comply with the one without the other; or transgress against the one, without transgressing against the other.

To make this evident, we need but consider what it is to love God above all Things. I speak not of the Love of God in its highest Perfection: For this divine
Quality

Quality has undoubtedly its several Degrees, and is always in its Increase or Wane, till it be fixed in Heaven, where it will be rewarded with a Degree of Glory, answerable to its Merit and Perfection in this Life : But the Love I speak of, is that which is absolutely necessary to Salvation, and consists in an effectual Preference of God before all Things in this World : So that the Precept of loving God above all Things, obliges us indispensably to give him the Preference in our Hearts to all Creatures, in such a Manner, as to be ready to sacrifice every Thing to him, be it Honour, Interest, or Inclination, that pretends to stand in Competition with him : In a Word, to love God above all Things, is to desire above all Things to be united to him by Grace in this Life, and to possess him eternally hereafter.

Now, what we are bound to desire above all Things, we are bound to seek preferably before all Things : For Almighty God contents himself not with mere barren Desires, which produce no Effect ; as a Husbandman would not be content with a Tree that should only bear Leaves, and bring forth no Fruit : In effect, the Desires of the Heart are but as secret Springs, that give Motion to all the Faculties both of Soul and Body, and apply them to Ac-
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tion: Nay, 'tis impossible they should do otherwise, when they are sincere. Have we ever seen a covetous Man sit idle, and not make it his principal Business to hoard up Money? Have we ever seen an ambitious Man unactive in the Pursuit of Honour; or a voluptuous Man without Application in seeking his Pleasures? No, surely; there never was an Example of it; because whatever Desire is predominant in the Heart, the same produces naturally a Series of Actions, in which there appears not only a direct Tendency to the Object of that Desire, but a certain Eagerness in the Pursuit of it.

The same is therefore to be said, when the Love of God prevails in the Heart: 'Tis impossible our Practice should run quite counter to that Love, or that Almighty God should have our Hearts, whilst the World has all our Actions: Whence it follows, that if we sincerely love God above all Things, we shall also seek him sincerely before all Things; and if the Possession of him be the principal Object of our Desires, it will also be the principal Object of our Application and Pursuit; the Consequence whereof 'tis, that the same Precept which commands us to love God, that is, to value and desire the Possession of him above all Things, commands us
likewise

likewise to make the securing this Happiness to ourselves the chief Business of our Lives.

The Obligation then admits of no Dispute, and its Extent is as unquestionable; it reaches all Mankind, and every Stage of Life, from the Use of Reason, is concerned in it: For, in effect, what is Man's Life in this World designed for by Almighty God, but to be a Passage to a better? So that, from the very Moment of our Entrance into this mortal State, we are as Passengers upon our Way to the other, which is immortal. During our Infancy, indeed, Baptismal Grace alone suffices to secure us of the everlasting Possession of Almighty God: But when we grow up to the Use of Reason, and become full Masters of our own free Wills to choose Good or Evil, 'tis then we come within the Obligation which no human Power can dispense with, of *seeking first the Kingdom of God*: And this Obligation remains in full Force as long as we live; and whoever discharges himself faithfully of it, is sure to find, at the End of his mortal Race, the happy Eternity he has sought.

The XXXIVth ENTERTAINMENT.

Practical Inferences from the foregoing Truth.

Seek first the Kingdom of God. Mat. vi. 33.

IN my last Discourse I have fully represented the Obligation of *seeking first the Kingdom of God*; but since it follows hence, that all Transgressors against this Duty cannot but be out of the Way of Salvation, it will be necessary to examine who they are that may be said to comply or not comply with it; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

Whoever finds in himself a strong Inclination to please God in every Thing, and fears nothing more than to offend him, receives Afflictions as coming from the Hand of God, with an entire Submission to him; uses the Things of this World according to the Order of Providence, and is ready in his Heart to part with them, rather than do any Thing contrary to the Principles of Religion, or the Dictates of his Conscience: Such a one may be truly said to *seek first the Kingdom of God*; that is, to make the Salvation of his Soul the

chief

chief Business of his Life: And the contrary Judgment must be made of those who find not these Dispositions prevailing in their Hearts.

Whence it follows, *first*, that they who get a Livelihood by any unlawful Means, or live in any Habit of mortal Sin, are far from *seeking first the Kingdom of God*; because their continuing wilfully in a State, which excludes them from that Kingdom, is a manifest Proof, that they prefer the Object of some criminal Passion before it. The same is to be said of those, who in their Discourses preach up any Custom or Practice flatly condemned by the Gospel, or are resolved in their Hearts to conform themselves to it, if an Occasion should present itself.

I speak particularly of the detestable Practice of Duels; which is so generally maintained by Persons of both Sexes, that I can scarce remember I ever heard a Laick speak against it: I have sometimes ventured to represent the Foulness of it in its true Colours; but it was the same as reasoning against a Hurricane; and I never got any Thing but Laughter for my Pains, as if I had maintained the most ridiculous Paradox in the World.

No-body indeed pretends to say, in express Terms, that Duelling is no Sin; be-
cause

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cause the very first Principles of Religion would give him the Lie : But, whether Sin or no Sin, most Discourses I have heard upon this Subject, tended to make it appear a Thing so *necessary* and *indispensable*, that whoever should scruple at it in certain Occasions, was set forth as a Man of lost Honour; and as unfit to shew his Head, as one branded with the Infamy of Cowardice. Thus an Abhorrence of Murder, or not venturing to leap Head-long into Hell-fire, is represented as Cowardice, and Imitating the *Patience* and *Humility* of *Jesus Christ*, has a Mark of Infamy set upon it in these unchristian Discourses.

In effect, if such Discourses be not highly criminal, Christianity is a Jest; the Gospels ought to be burnt, and the four *Evangelists* condemned as Authors of a Morality that renders Men infamous, and unworthy to be ranked among Men of Honour: But why is not the fifth Commandment, *Thou shalt not murder*, struck out of the Decalogue? It is certainly unjust, if Duelling may be lawfully encouraged: Nay, why is an infamous Death its Punishment even by all human Laws? For can it enter into the Thoughts of a Man of Sense, that an infamous Punishment should be the just Reward of an Action that is not only honourable, but is indispensable

dispensable and necessary? 'Tis therefore manifest, that nothing but the Instigation of the Devil can make Men stand up in Defence of a Practice which has all Laws both human and divine against it: The Law of God forbids it; the Gospel condemns it; the Law of Nature cries out against it; the Civil Law punishes it as an infamous Crime; and the Laws of the Church express their Abhorrence of it, by excommunicating the Parties concerned, and denying Christian Burial to the unhappy Victims of it. A Cause must certainly be very infamous, to lie under so many heavy Condemnations!

But it is foreign from my Purpose, to enter any farther into the Nature of it, or unmask its whole Deformity; my only Business is to shew, that they, who are disposed in their Hearts to conform themselves to this mad Custom of the World, are not in the Number of those who *seek first the Kingdom of God*, or make their Salvation their chief Concern; since they are disposed to prefer the Esteem of Men, nay, of Fools and Madmen, before God's Favour: Their Hearts are therefore criminal, tho' their Hands remain innocent; and they who encourage them to it by their Discourses, are Accomplices with them in their Crime.

But

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But I shall now turn my Discourse to another Sort of worldly Persons: Those I mean, who express indeed an Abhorrence of all Vice, yet pass their Lives in a kind of regular Circle of unprofitable Amusements, or what the World calls innocent Divertisements and Pleasures; and the Question is, whether these Persons may be said to make their Salvation their *chief Business*?

I will first answer it, by proposing another of the same Nature, *viz.* Whether a Steward, or any other Servant, that should daily spend the best Part of his Time in diverting himself, may, with any Colour of Truth, be said to apply himself chiefly to his Master's Business? The two Cases seem to be exactly parallel; and if Men's Judgments were as unbiass'd in Things relating to their Salvation, as they are in Reference to their temporal Concerns, I cannot doubt, but the Cause of the *idle Christian* would appear full as bad as that of the *idle Servant*.

But, to give a direct Answer to it, I shall lay down a Principle, which appears to be self-evident, *viz.* *Whoever leads a Life made up of such Actions, as are no Ways referable to Almighty God, cannot in any Measure be said to make his Salvation his chief Business*; because, since nothing is
conducting

conducting to Salvation, but what is *referable to God*, it follows, that all such Actions, as are not referable to him, are not *conducting to Salvation*: And by Consequence a Person, who leads a Course of Life chiefly made up of such Actions, can not be said to make his Salvation his *chief Business*; for that alone can be called a Man's chief Business, in order to which his Time is chiefly employ'd, and at which his Actions chiefly aim.

Now then let us confront a Life of Pleasures with the Principle I have laid down, and see whether it can stand the Test. Can any Man, without intending to mock God, make an Offering to him of an idle and unprofitable Life? Can he have the Confidence to tell him, it is for his Sake he daily spends the greatest Part of his Time in passing from one Diversion to another? That it is for Love of him he daily studies to gratify his own Inclinations and Humour? Finally, that it is in Compliance with his holy Will he leads a Life of Ease, of Idleness, and Pleasures? I scarce can think a Person, that has any Sense of Conscience or Religion, dares, with a serious Reflection, use this Language to Almighty God, or make him an Offering of
of Life,



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If you ask, how it is possible, that a Person supposed to be free from Vice should be out of the Way of Salvation? I answer, it is very possible; because he may be guilty of *mortal Sin*, tho' he be free from what the World usually calls *Vice*; and every mortal Sin is an Obstacle to Salvation. Thus *Lucifer* and his Angels were condemned, without being guilty of that Sort of Vice; the *Pharisees* were condemned by *Christ*, tho' he never accused them of any gross Vice; the *five foolish Virgins*, tho' Virgins, were excluded from the Marriage-feast, because they had not their *Lamps trimmed*; and the *slothful Servant* stands recorded as condemned in the Gospel, tho' he was only convicted of not having improved his Master's Talent: Whence it follows, that there are many Sins, besides those the World calls *Vice*, which will exclude us from the Kingdom of God: For there are mortal Sins of *Omission*, as well as *Commission*; there are mortal Sins of *Thought*, as well as *Deed*; and *Pride* and *Sloth*, which are in the Number of *capital Sins*, may become as mortal as *Luxury* and *Intemperance*.

The only Question then is, what Sin those who live idly, and chiefly study their *Pleasures*, are guilty of? I answer, their *most remarkable Sin* is *Sloth*; which consists

sists chiefly in a gross and supine Neglect of their Soul's Salvation. Their Sin is their being their own *Idols*, and seeking to please themselves more than Almighty God. Finally, their Sin is their leading a Life irreconcilable with the sacred Maxims of the Gospel.

I shall quote some few, pronounced by Christ, to shew I am not guilty of Exaggeration. *The Way*, says Christ, *that leads to Life is narrow — Unless ye do Penance, ye shall all perish, — He that takes not up his Cross and follows me, is not worthy of me, — Strive to enter by the narrow Gate. — Be watchful and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation :* And how does a Life of Idleness and Pleasures agree with these sacred Maxims? Can it be call'd the *narrow Way*? Is it a Life of *Penance*? Is it the Way of the *Cross*? Is it *following Christ*? Is it entering by the *narrow Gate*? Finally, is it a Life of *Watchfulness* and *Prayer*? The contrary is so evident, that to go about to prove it, would be labouring rather to obscure than clear the Truth: We need not then be long in search of the Sin they are guilty of: It shews itself plainly to those that will but open their Eyes to see it.

However, I cannot but observe, that the Supposition of their keeping within the
Bounds

Bounds of every Thing that is lawful in itself, seems somewhat speculative, and is scarce to be found in Practice. The Reason is, because since even those, who apply themselves to the Practice of penitential Works, are not free from dangerous Temptations, and have Difficulty enough to resist Vice; it seems very extraordinary that they, who chiefly study their Pleasures, should keep wholly free from it: And therefore, it appears far more probable, that the same Root of Self-love, and the same Principle of not denying themselves any Thing they have a Mind to within the Bounds of what seems lawful, will by Degrees become as prevalent upon them in relation to Pleasures of another kind, when they present themselves: Especially if we consider, that there appears nothing in their Lives to entitle them to those assisting Graces, without which corrupt Nature will easily be overcome by the frequent Allurements and Assaults of Vice: And so we may conclude without Danger of rash Judgment, that a Life without Rule or Order, a Life of Idleness and Pleasures, finally, a Life of Humour and Inclination, attended with a great Neglect of Prayer and the Sacraments, will not keep long from being concern'd in something more, than what falls within the reputed Limits of innocent and lawful.

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There remains but one Point more to be clear'd, with which I shall end, *viz.* how Persons, who employ the most considerable Part of their Time in worldly Concerns, as many as are necessitated to do, may be said to make their Salvation their chief Business? In Answer to it, I lay down a *second* undoubted Maxim, *viz.* *that whatsoever is referable to God, may be render'd conducing to Salvation.* Now of this Nature are all temporal Employments; that is, the Duties of any honest and lawful Calling, wherein Men are engaged by the Order of Providence: For, since the Government of the World is put immediately into the Hands of Men, it is the Order of Providence, that every one should be faithful in performing the Duties of the Station, wherein Providence has placed him. So that, tho' *Temporal* and *Spiritual*, that is, the Concerns of this Life, and those of the Life to come, seem very opposite to one another, yet the *Temporal* may be made subservient to the *Spiritual*, and the Concerns of this Life to those of the next, by being offered up, *first*, in Conformity to the Will of God; and *secondly*, in the Spirit of Penance: Because all Duties whatsoever being a Restraint upon our Inclinations, which naturally carry us to Liberty and Ease, they may all be put into the
Number.

Number of penitential Works, and render'd such in effect, by a sincere Oblation of the Heart. Whence it plainly follows, that, though the most considerable Part of a Man's Time be employed in worldly Concerns, he may nevertheless be said to make his Salvation his chief Business, provided his Labours be attended with the Disposition I have mentioned, and no essential Duty of a Christian Life be neglected.

This Caution is very necessary ; because tho' Temporal Employments be not of their own Nature, a Hinderance to Salvation, they may be rendered so by an over-Solicitude, or a neglect of Duties commanded : For a Man may be too busy, as well as too lazy to save his Soul ; and there are many, who instead of making their temporal Employments instrumental to their Salvation, sacrifice their Salvation to their temporal Employments : Their Hearts are so taken up with the Cares and Solitudes of this Life, that Almighty God, and the Concerns of their future State can scarce find any Room in their Thoughts : And by this Mismanagement their Souls are insensibly starved for Want of a sufficient Nourishment of Prayer, and the Sacraments, so indispensably necessary to support *their spiritual Life and Health* : Whereas, if

if they took this seriously to Heart, they might easily contrive Matters so, that neither the Spiritual nor Temporal should be neglected. For as no Pretence of Business can hinder them from daily nourishing the Body, or providing for its Cure, when it is Indisposed; so ought it not to hinder them from daily affording a sufficient Nourishment of Prayer to the Soul, nor from taking timely Care of its Cure when it labours under any spiritual Distemper.

I shall conclude, with Repeating once more the Words of my Text, *Seek first the Kingdom of God.* A Christian, to speak properly, has no other Business in this World, than that of saving his Soul; because it is for that alone God has bestowed Life upon him; and all other Concerns ought to be Subordinate, and made instrumental to it: And therefore our Saviour calls it *the only necessary Thing*; because it is alone of indispensable Necessity. *What will it avail a Man, says Christ, if he gains the whole World, and loses his Soul? What will it indeed avail us, to have abounded in Wealth, if, after the short Course of this Life, we fall into everlasting Misery and Want? What will it avail us to have enjoyed all the Pleasures of this World, if we be hereafter condemned to everlasting Torments? What will it avail us to have*
gratified

gratified our Inclinations, indulged our Senses, and lead an easy and merry Life for some few Years, if after that short Term of Time we begin a painful and unhappy Eternity?

But, how unfortunate are those poor Wretches, who take a great deal of Pains in this World, perhaps to lose their Souls in the next? They lead a toilsome and laborious Life, groan under continual Cares and Solitudes, and endure great Hardships and Fatigues; yet all the while by the Neglect of some easy Duties, which would be a Means to sanctify all their Works, gain nothing in order to a happy Eternity: So that all their Toil and Labour, though penitential in itself, and capable of being made a Means to obtain Life everlasting, if it were sincerely offered up in the Spirit of Penance, and Conformity to the Will of God, remains fruitless, for want of this holy Disposition; and is like a Treasure lock'd up, which lies dead, and turns to no Account to its Owner: Whereas, if they labour'd for God at the same Time that they labour'd for Bread, their Pains would be rewarded with everlasting Joys.

The

The XXXVth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Danger of the World, and Necessity of being arm'd against it.

We know that we are of God, and that the whole World lieth in Wickedness.
1. John v. 19.

THE general Corruption of the World, is the great Source of Sin, and a powerful Incentive to it. That therefore we may be made sensible of the Necessity of being strongly guarded against it, (for which I shall give some Directions in my next Discourse) the Subject of this Entertainment shall be, to represent the Danger to which we are exposed, of being tainted with the Spirit of the World, and the Obligation arising from it to arm ourselves against this Danger.

If the Love of the World were a harmless or indifferent Thing, there could be no Danger in conversing with it: But our very Baptismal Vows, by which we have renounced the *World*, the *Flesh*, and the *Devil*, are a demonstrative Proof, that the *World* is one of the three capital Enemies
of

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of God and our Souls, against which we are bound to fight as long as we live : But tho' we were not under the Obligation of these Vows, both *Christ* and his *Apostles* have pronounced so peremptorily against the *World*, and the Lovers of it, that it is impossible to espouse their Cause, without declaring ourselves Enemies to *Christ* and his *Doctrine*.

Let us first hear *Christ* himself speak : He tells us, *First*, that *the World hates him*. John xv. 18. *Secondly*, That it neither sees, nor knows, nor can receive the Spirit of Truth. John xiv. 17. *Thirdly*, That its Works are evil. John vii. 7. And *Fourthly*, That as the *World* has hated him, so will it also hate his Disciples, because they are not of the *World*, but he has chosen them out of the *World*. John xv. 19.

Thus is the *World* stigmatized by *Christ*, nor are the *Apostles* more favourable to it. Hear then what Character they give of it. Be not conformed to the *World*, says *St. Paul*, Rom. xii. 2. *St. James* seconds him in this Manner. Know ye not that the Friendship of the *World* is Enmity of God ; whoever therefore will be a Friend of the *World*, is the Enemy of God. James iv. 4. And *St. John* is no less severe upon it. The whole *World* lies in Wickedness. 1 John v. 19. And again, If any Man (saye he) loveth the *World*, the Love of the Fa-
ther

ther is not in him: For all that is in the World, the Lust of the Flesh, and the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life, is not of the Father, but is of the World. 1 John ii. 15.

We must own these Texts are very frightful, if we consider how great a Number of worldly Christians are flatly condemn'd by them: For 'tis impossible to read them, and not be convinced that the Love of the World is a mortal Poison to the Soul, as being inconsistent with the Love of God; that is, with a Condition essentially necessary to Salvation.

It remains then only to consider the Danger, to which we live expos'd, of being ourselves infected with this Poison. This Danger proceeds principally from our being under a Necessity of keeping Company with those, who are already more or less tainted with it. For 'tis by the mutual Intercourse of *Seeing, Hearing, and Discoursing*, that all our Ideas, nay, even Inclinations, whether good or bad, are in some Measure form'd; tho' with this remarkable Difference, that the Influence of bad Company is usually more prevalent than that of good; because Virtue meets an Opposition, and Vice a Conformity in our Nature; so that, as Bodies, which are unsound, and full of bad Hu-

mours, are apt to take any Sort of Infection; so our Nature, corrupted by original Sin, and of itself prone to Evil, easily sucks in the spiritual Distempers of those with whom we converse: And therefore 'tis no Wonder, that by daily *hearing the Discourse*, and *seeing the Example* of Persons, whose Heads and Hearts are full of the World, we should be in Danger of being influenced by them in our Principles as well as Practice, and be insensibly drawn into the easy broad Way of the World, which leads to everlasting Perdition.

First then, as to the Danger of their *Discourse*; 'tis a known Truth, that *the Mouth speaks out of the Abundance of the Heart*: And therefore, as Lungs that are tainted cannot but cause a foul Breath, so a Heart tainted with the Love of the World will naturally produce Discourses suitable to that Passion. Consider but what Subjects the Entertainments of the World usually run upon: Has God Almighty any Share in them? Do they ever put us in Mind of the Concerns of Eternity? Alas! to set on Foot a Discourse of Piety, in any publick Assembly, is become as great a Trespass against good Manners, as to affect to speak a Language the Company does not understand: Nay, the very Design of worldly Conversation is what we call to
divert;

divert ; that is, to draw the Mind from the Thought of every Thing that is serious, and amuse it with such Objects as are most agreeable to corrupt Nature : So that the greatest Part of worldly Assemblies is composed of Persons, who meet together for no other End, than to entertain one another with something relating to that Object which takes up the chief Place in their Affections ; each one being most delighted in setting off the Idol of his own prevailing Passion, whether it be Honours, Riches, or Pleasures, or whatever the Thing be to which he is most inclined by Nature : And as it is their Love and Esteem of these Things that makes them take a Pleasure in discoursing of them, so it gives them a certain natural Eloquence, to set them off to the best Advantage, and at the same Time to inspire others with the same Esteem and Love of them : For all Discourses of this Nature are properly the Language of Men's Passions ; and as they are prompted by their Passions, so they serve only to enkindle them in others. 'Tis by these, and other such like Entertainments, we inflame each other with the Love of the World : 'Tis by these we foment and nourish our corrupt Inclinations, encourage Pride and Vanity, and insensibly work up Men's Hearts into such a Value

and Esteem of earthly Things, as at last may prove a mortal Poison to the Soul.

The Reason hereof is very plain; because we need no other Sin, to lose our Souls for ever, than to love any Thing in this World so, as in our Hearts to prefer the Possession of it before the Friendship of Almighty God: 'Tis true, it often happens, that we know not how deep a Root the Love of the Things of this World has already taken in our Hearts; because, for Want of Occasion, we have not yet been put to the Proof, whether God or those Things be dearer to us: But whether we do, or do not know it, 'tis very certain, that, naturally speaking, nothing contributes more to heighten our Esteem and Love of any Thing, than to hear it continually praised and admired by those we daily converse withall: And since it is likewise evident, that the greater Esteem and Love we have for any Thing, the more unwilling we are to part with it; it follows, that our Affection to the Things of this World may be insensibly heighten'd to such a Degree, that when by any Trial we are put to the Choice to renounce either them, or the Grace and Friendship of Almighty God, the World may be grown too hard for our Duty; as it happens but too often *in the unfortunate Examples of those who*
renounce

renounce their Religion to save their Estates, or attain to some Preferment at Court : For 'tis plain, that the Love of the World prevails in their Hearts, and determines them to that unhappy Choice with the utter Ruin of their Souls.

However, tho' the *Language* of the World be so very dangerous, as I have shewn ; its *Example* carries much more Danger with it ; for Words would, in some Measure, lose their Force, were they not seconded by a suitable Practice : But the Children of this World speak more effectually by their Deeds, than with their Tongues ; and shew evidently, from the unequal Distribution of their Solitude, Time, and Expence, between the Concerns of this Life and the other, where their Heart and Treasure lies. Now, is there any Thing more catching than a general Example, especially when it favours our natural Inclinations ? Is there any Thing influences our Judgments, and by consequence our Wills, more powerfully, than the constant Practice of those we converse with ?

I need but offer one familiar Instance to convince you of this Truth : That which makes so great a Noise in the World, and is called the *Mode*, is nothing but the general Example of some Town or Country, which is so irresistably prevalent, that it seems

seems to drag Men to a certain Necessity of Compliance ; for let a Thing be never so inconvenient, expensive, or even absurd in itself, if it be the *Mode*, if it be the Custom and Practice of others, and generally authoriz'd by Example, it is almost in vain to speak against it, and very few have the Courage not to conform themselves to it ; insomuch, that it is become a common Proverb, That a Man had as good be out of the World, as out of the Fashion : And pray consider, whether any Mode be more general, than to live according to the Spirit and Maxims of the World ? Or whether there be any Thing more antiquated, and worn out of Fashion, than to live up to the sacred Maxims of the Gospel ? For, alas ! how few are there, even of those that are not noted for any scandalous Irregularities, whose Lives may be said to have a Conformity to the Faith they profess ? What Proof do they give, that Heaven is their principal Concern, and Salvation the chief Business of their Lives ? They say, indeed, they love God above all Things, but their Actions seem to speak another Language ; since their small and negligent Application to the Duties of Religion is no great Sign that their Hearts and Treasure are in Heaven ; and their spending the largest Part of their Time in studying
their

their Divertisements and Pleasures, is but too convincing a Proof, that their chief Business is not to serve God, but to please themselves.

Since then we may conclude, that the World is full of Danger, both in Regard of its *Discourse*, and *Example*; the two Things, which, doubtless, have a very great Power over Man's Will, and Influence upon his Actions; it will now be an easy Task to prove the Obligation we all have to arm ourselves against it: For it appears, from what has been said, that our Condition in this World is much the same as that of a Person who is forced to swim for Life against a rapid Stream; whom therefore we should give over for lost, if he should leave off struggling against it. Our Case, I say, is much the same; for the Corruption of the World is as an impetuous Torrent, that strives to carry all before it, and whose Violence is very hard to be resisted; yet we must either resist it, or perish in it; for since our Circumstances oblige us to live in the Midst of this Torrent, we have but one Way to save ourselves, which is, resolving to struggle against it by the Use of such holy Exercises as are most proper to preserve us from being overcome by it.

I know it is a common Error amongst worldly Persons to imagine, that living up

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to the Maxims of the Gospel belongs only to religious Persons, or such as are wholly retired from the World. Both *St. Basil* and *St. Chrysostom* complain, that many in their Time were under this Mistake; and I find the Ground of it to be no other than a wrong or imperfect Notion of Christianity: For, whoever will but seriously consider what it is to be a *Christian*, and what we are obliged to precisely by Virtue of that Character, will soon be convinced, that there is no Difference between *Religious* and *Laicks*, as to any essential Duty or Virtue taught by Christ, and commanded in the Gospels. *Thou deceivest thyself*, (says *St. Chrysostom*) *and art grossly mistaken, if thou imaginest that one Thing is required of Seculars, another of Monks.* The Reason whereof is clear, because we can have no other Notion of Virtue or Perfection, than what the Gospel itself has marked out; and the Gospel was writ and published for all Sorts of Callings. *Dost thou think* (says *St. Basil*) *that the Gospels were not also written for married Persons?* And he continues thus: *Let us not doubt, but of whatever Calling we be, we shall be demanded on Account of them, as well as Hermits and Religious.*

In Effect, *Religious* and *Laicks*, considered precisely as *Christians*, are all of the
same

same *Order*: We have all made the same *Vows*, viz. of renouncing the Devil, with all his Poms and Works; we have all the same *Founder*, viz. *Jesus Christ*, from whom we take our Name, and whose Disciples we profess to be; we have all the same *Rule* to live by, viz. the *Gospel*; the same *End* to aim at, viz. *Perfection*; and the same *Reward* to hope for, viz. *Life everlasting*. This is the great Order of *Christianity*; and, without all Dispute, the noblest that ever was instituted; whether we consider the Dignity of its Founder, the Holiness of its Rule, the Purity of its Doctrine, the Sublimeness of its End, or finally, the Number and illustrious Characters of the Persons enrolled in it: The greatest Monarchs upon Earth glory, in being not only Members, but Protectors of this holy Order; and are as much obliged to observe all its Rules, as those who live in Cloisters, and are wholly sequester'd from the World.

Whence it follows, that there is not any Virtue commanded by the Gospel, which all are not bound to aspire to, as well as the most rigid Monks. All have the same Obligation to *love God above all Things, and their Neighbour as themselves*: To have their Hearts disengaged from the Love of the World; to use Violence to their Inclinations,

nations, and do Penance for their Sins; finally, to be *humble, meek, patient*, and resign'd in all Things to the Will of God. Are not all Men equally concerned in these Maxims delivered by Christ? *Whoever will be my Disciple, let him deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow me. — Whoever loves his Father or Mother, Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. — Whoever takes not up his Cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me. — I have set you an Example, that you may also do as I have done.* Were not the following Instructions address'd to all? *Be watchful, for you know not the Day nor Hour. — Seek first the kingdom of God. — Unless ye do Penance, ye shall likewise all perish.* And is it not then plain what St. Basil teaches, that all will be judged by these Maxims in the great Day of Accounts? If so, then all are equally bound to make them the Rule of their Lives: And in this Respect, there is no Difference between *Religious* and *Seculars*, the *Clergy* and *Laitie*, since these are *Christians* as well as the other; that is, Disciples of the same crucified Christ, mark'd with the same spiritual Character, Members under the same Head, redeem'd with the same precious Blood, and tending to the self-same End.

This then being an undoubted Truth, viz. that living in the World exempts no Man

Man from any Duty of a Christian Life, I leave every one to judge, whether Persons engaged in this State can pretend to comply with the Obligation incumbent on them, without daily arming themselves against the Dangers and Temptations, to which they live exposed; they are all bound to live according to the Spirit of the Gospel; and that, amidst a corrupt World, which by the Allurement of its Discourse and Example, is a continual Snare to them; They are therefore bound of course to employ such Means, as are proportioned to the Task they have upon their Hands, and the Difficulties that attend it.

'Tis true, they are not tied down to the same Means as Persons engaged in a religious State: Because, though they be excellent in themselves, they are not suitable to all Conditions. However since, as *Christians*, they are bound to have the self-same End in View; whatever Means they make Choice of, they must be such as will answer the End they aim at. Nay, as their Dangers and Temptations are greater, their Watchfulness to secure themselves ought to be so too. Persons shut up in Cloisters are, as it were, in a safe Harbour; but they who live in the World, are in the midst of a tempestuous Sea. Religious are as an Ar-

my strongly intrench'd with the particular Laws and Constitutions of their Order ; but Laicks are in the open Field, encompassed with many Enemies : And therefore, next after the Protection of Almighty God, on whose assisting Grace they must depend in every Thing, they have nothing but their own Watchfulness, and spiritual Arms to trust to. So that the Obligation of keeping a strict Guard upon themselves, and being always in a posture of Defence, is rather more pressing upon these than the other. Because all are equally bound to conquer, and Laicks have at least one very dangerous Enemy upon their Hands more than Religious, *viz.* the *World*, which they must overcome, as well as the other Enemies of their Salvation.

THE XXXVth ENTERTAINMENT.

Means. to preserve us from the Corruption of the World.

This is the Victory, that overcometh the World, 1 John. v. 4.

THE Danger of the World, and the Necessity of being strongly fortified against it, have been fully represented in my last Discourse. I presume then it will not be unacceptable to have some Directions how this is to be done ; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

Suppose it were our Misfortune to live in a Town infected with the Plague, and that our temporal Concerns would not permit us to remove from it ; let us consider seriously, what we should do in that Case, to preserve ourselves from catching the Distemper : For if we have but the same Solitude, and use the same Precautions to secure ourselves against the Corruption of the World, as we would to avoid the Plague, we may, with the Help of God's Grace, live as untainted in the World, as *Lot* did in the midst of *Sodom*.

First,

First then, in the Case supposed, it is certain we should endeavour to keep at the greatest Distance possible from all Persons and Houses infected with it. *Secondly*, if there were a good wholesome Air upon any neighbouring Hill, we should walk thither for Health, as often as our Domestick Affairs would permit us. And *Thirdly*, we should not neglect the Use of Antidotes or Preservatives recommended by the ablest Physicians. These doubtless, are the Precautions all rational Men would make use of for their Security in the Case supposed, and may therefore serve for Directions to all Christians, what they must do to save their Souls amidst the general Contagion of the World.

In the first Place therefore, there are certain Persons infected in a more notorious Degree than others; whose Company is to be avoided as much as is possible: I principally mean, profess'd Libertines, and such as in their Discourse affect to make a Jest of Religion, and turn its most sacred Maxims into Ridicule. These are the very rankest Bane and Poison of Souls in Conversation; and it is without Dispute, that of all sorts of unchristian Discourses, *Prophaneness* is the most pernicious and destructive to Piety and Virtue: *First*, because it strikes at the very Root of all
Christian

Christian Morality ; and *Secondly*, because it does it in the most effectual Manner possible, *viz.* by way of Railery and Banter ; which being a Diversion to the Company, is usually listened to with Pleasure, and therefore makes a deeper and more lasting Impression. 'Tis by this prophane Buffoonery, that Morality is brought into Contempt, that Men are made ashamed to speak and act like Christians ; and many who would not easily have been seduced any other Way, have been laugh'd out of all Principles of Religion.

These Persons therefore are to be avoided as the Plague. *The Poison of Asps is under their Lips*, Psalm xiii. 4. *Their Tongues are a World of Iniquity, and set on Fire of Hell*, James iii. 6. For they are not content barely to preach up the World, but labour to do the Devil's Work for him a shorter Way. Their Profession is to run down Christianity, to set up Atheism, and turn Religion out of Doors.

But, as the Company of these prophane Scoffers and Deriders of Religion is manifestly dangerous, so there are also certain *Places*, where the Spirit of the World reigns much more absolutely than elsewhere ; and are therefore more contagious, especially if they be much frequented. Amongst these, the *Theatre* has a Mark set upon it by all
spiritual

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spiritual Writers : For 'tis there the World appears in its greatest Pomp, and dress'd up in all its most tempting Allurements : 'Tis there Men's Eyes and Ears are entertained with Objects most agreeable to Flesh and Blood : 'Tis there, in fine, our natural Passions are not only flattered, but heighten'd and inflam'd to a very great Degree. *Love*, the most dangerous and violent of Passions reigns upon the Stage, and is its principal Support. *Ambition* and *Revenge* are treated with Honour ; rewarded with Success ; and set forth, in most Tragedies, as Accomplishments necessary to make a great Man : And, as for Characters represented in Comedies, even those that are counted perfect, and proposed as Patterns for Imitation, have usually a Mixture of such Qualities, as would flatly damn a Man, if he were found guilty of them at the Hour of Death.

However, I will not pretend to assert positively, that it is unlawful ever to go to a Play : I will only lay down some Maxims, which can admit of no Dispute. *First*, All those who find by Experience, that going to Plays is to them an immediate Occasion of Sin, or at least a great Incentive to it, are bound in Conscience to deprive themselves wholly of that Diversion. *Secondly*, when the Language, Design, or Representation

presentation of any Play is notoriously immodest, 'tis unlawful to be present at it; because the Danger in that Case is manifest; and *be that loves Danger shall perish in it.* Whence it follows, *Thirdly*, that to take the Chance of a Play, without being any ways informed of its Character, is to run the Hazard of offending God mortally. And *Fourthly*, that those, who make a Custom of going indifferently to all, may judge positively of themselves, that an innocent Diversion is not the chief Motive of their going.

But the surest Rule, and which no Body can call in Question, is, that the less all Places of publick Spectacles are frequented, the better it is, because the safer: Which is Reason enough in any Case; wherein the Life or Health of our Bodies is concern'd; For then no Man amuses himself with examining how great or little the Danger of Infection is in such or such Companies or Places; but if any Danger at all be reasonably suspected, there needs no more to determine any Man to avoid them as much as is possible. If then our Souls were as dear to us as our Bodies, we should act upon the same Principle, and by the same Rule, in all Cases in which our spiritual Life or Health is in any Measure concerned. Instead of examining nicely the Degrees
of

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of Danger, our sole Care would be to inform ourselves impartially, whether there were any at all: And if any were discovered, we should take the same Measures for the safety of our Souls, as we do for that of our Bodies. If this Rule were observed, all publick Spectacles, which no Man doubts but are attended with some degree of Danger, would be as little frequented, as Houses that are cry'd down for being haunted with evil Spirits, or infected with a contagious Air.

However, it is not enough to avoid all Companies and Places where the Danger is greatest; because all worldly Conversation is attended with Danger enough, to oblige all Christians to be upon their Guard, and use Means to fortify themselves against it: And therefore we must also have Recourse to the second Sort of Precaution, which we should make Use of in Case we lived in a Town infected with a pestilential Distemper. For, as in that Case we should be glad, as often as we could, to walk up to some neighbouring Hill, to breath a purer Air; so we must do in a spiritual Manner for the Health of our Souls. We must go, as often as we can, to the Mountain of Prayer, there to converse for some Time with Almighty God, and let our Souls breath a better Air, than the Necessity of our Affairs.

Affairs will permit them to do at other Times.

This directs us to a Duty of great Importance; I mean, our Morning and Evening Devotions; which ought never to be omitted, unless some indispensable Business renders them impracticable; and then they may be supplied by something equivalent, if Care be taken; as, frequent Elevations of the Heart to God, or short ejaculatory Prayers, of which we ought to have a constant Provision, and which hinder no Business.

The main Point is to have a true Zeal, and hearty good Will; for these never want Time nor Opportunity to serve God according to every one's respective State or Condition: Whereas cold and slothful Christians can seldom find any, even when they have more Time lying upon their Hands, than they know how to dispose of; and then what Wonder is it, that the World should grow prevalent in their Hearts; since they do nothing to hinder it from working its whole Effect upon them? Whereas, a daily Communication with God by Morning and Evening Prayer, would be a powerful Counter-poise against it: Supposing withall that there be no notorious Neglect in the Devotions of Sundays and Holidays; which being Days of Vacation from temporal Business, and set apart for God's Service, afford Opportunity for all sorts

sorts of spiritual Exercises, that are proper to season the Soul against the contagious Air of the World: And 'tis incredible how much they would contribute to this End, if they were constantly employ'd as they ought to be, according to the Intention of the Church. But if on the contrary, they be made Days of Vacation from spiritual as well as temporal Concerns, and consecrated to Idleness, the Mother of all Vice, truly I cannot well imagine how Persons in the World, will save their Souls; since by this Abuse, their Time is not only almost wholly divided between their Business and Pleasures, but God is generally most offended on those very Days, on which it ought to be their principal Endeavour to obtain such a Stock of Grace for the rest of the Week, as with the additional Aid of Morning and Evening Prayer, might suffice to strengthen them both against worldly Infection, and other Temptations, to which they live exposed.

The third and last sort of Means to be made Use of against the Contagion of the World, are those I call *Antidotes* or *Preservatives*; of which there are two principally recommended by all Directors; namely, *spiritual Reading*, and the *Sacraments*. As to the first, it were to be heartily wish'd, that not only a Part of all
Sundays

Sundays and Holidays, but at least a small half Hour were daily employ'd in this holy Exercise. The Task is not great, and the Advantage of it will be very considerable: *First*, because it will supply the Want of publick Instruction, for which there is but little Opportunity in our Circumstances. And *Secondly*, because if perform'd with Attention, it will also in some Measure supply the Want of mental Prayer; which, tho' highly recommendable, is, through Mistake and want of Use, regarded as so difficult a Thing by those who live in the World, that few apply themselves to it: Tho' St. *Francis of Sales*, in his *Introduction to a devout Life*, recommends it to all Christians in general, and has set down an easy Method for the successful Performance of it.

But to return to my Subject, and shew why I call this Exercise of Reading an *Antidote* and *Preservative* against the Infection of the World: The Reason is very plain; because a constant Use of it will season our Souls with a Doctrine directly opposite to the Maxims preached up by the World; it will instruct us in all the Duties of a Christian; it will frequently put us in Mind of the Shortness and Uncertainty of this Life; and that there is an Eternity to come, in which we must be
either

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either infinitely happy or unhappy: This will wean us insensibly from the Love of the World, by convincing us of the Vanity of its Poms, the Folly and Poison of its Maxims, and the Emptiness of all its Pleasures: It will render Sin odious, and Virtue amiable; and encourage us to the Practice of it, by the Example of so many Saints, who are already gone before us: Finally, it will nourish the Spirit of Prayer, enkindle Devotion, excite us to Compunction, discover all the Snares of the Devil, and direct us how to avoid them.

And are not these most excellent Preservatives against the Love of the World? Is not all this very well worth the Trouble of a short half Hour's reading every Day? We shall certainly find it so, and have no Reason to regret the small Confinement it will oblige us to. Even all religious Orders, tho' separated from the World, are, by their Constitutions, obliged to this Exercise; because it is an universal Remedy for all spiritual Distempers: It fortifies Piety in those that have it, and warms those into it that have it not; as is manifest from the innumerable Examples of those, who have owed their entire Conversion even to the casual Reading of some *pious Book*, and became afterwards as
eminent

eminent Saints, as they had been remarkable before for the Irregularity of their Lives.

But the most sovereign *Antidote* or *Preservative* against the Corruption of the World, and indeed against all sinful Suggestions of our spiritual Enemies, is the Sacrament of the holy *Eucharist*, prepared by Christ himself for this End. Oh! if we took but Care to prepare ourselves, with the greatest Devotion we are able, for this holy Banquet, what Grace, what Strength, would it communicate to us! since Christ himself has assured us, that *he who eats this Bread, shall live for ever*; because, if he eats worthily, he has the very Source of Grace, and Fountain of Life remaining in him: And is not he sufficiently out of the Reach of Danger, who has Christ himself for a Safe-guard? We must therefore acknowledge, in a literal Sense, what *David* spoke prophetically, *Thou hast prepared a Table for me, against all who afflict me*; that is, a Food to strengthen us against all the Enemies of our Souls; of which if we eat, without obstructing the Operation of its Virtue by any wilful Neglect, we may then pronounce with a confident Assurance, *Tho' I shall walk in the Midst of the Shadow of Death, I shall*.

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I shall not fear Evil, because thou art with me.

If any one asks, how often the holy *Eucharist* ought to be received? I answer, if it be received worthily, the oftner the better; if unworthily, the oftner the worse: because as worthy Communion is never without Fruit, and an Increase of spiritual Strength; so nothing hardens the Heart more against the Inspirations of Divine Grace, than unworthy Communion: However, since it is to be supposed that no Christian, who has any Sense of his Duty, will approach the blessed Sacrament, wittingly and knowingly, with a Conscience charged with mortal Sin; the general Rule for Persons living in the Commerce of the World, is to communicate at least once a Month, and on the most solemn Feasts of the Church: For those who perform this Duty seldomer, defer it, for the most Part, either through Sloth, because they will not take the Pains to prepare themselves for it; or upon the Account of some sinful Habit, which they will not resolve to quit: But whatever the Cause may be, the Consequence is very dangerous.

We see then what we must do to arm ourselves against the Corruption of the World. I have proposed nothing beyond the very common Duties of a Christian Life:

Life : But these common Duties, if well and constantly performed, will have a wonderful Effect both on our Hearts and Actions ; whereas, they who neglect them, are, for the most Part, sooner or later noted for some remarkable Irregularity, or scandalous Disorder in their Lives.

We must consider, that the Number of those who perish in the World is very great; and tho' we be not allowed to judge of any one in particular, unless there be uncontestable Signs of his Reprobation, yet 'tis undoubted Truth, because Christ himself has declared it. But how comes it that so many perish ? For 'tis this we must chiefly consider ; that by discovering the Rock upon which they have suffered Ship-wreck, we may be cautioned to avoid it : How comes it then, I say, that so many perish in the World ? Do they want the necessary Means of Salvation ? Would they lose their Souls, if they were careful to employ the Means God's Providence has furnished them with to save them ? Would God be wanting to them, if they were not wanting to themselves ? 'Tis impious to say it. The Reason therefore why so many perish is, because the World is full of Danger, and yet the greatest Part of Christians live in the same supine Neglect, as if there were no Danger at all.

Suppose, that in a Town infected with the Plague, the greatest Part of its Inhabitants should not only expose themselves to all Manner of Danger without Necessity, but wholly neglect all Remedies prescribed in that Case; would not the natural Consequence of this mad Proceeding be, that very great Numbers would catch the Infection, and die of it? If therefore Christians, who live in the Midst of a corrupt World, will neither take care to keep out of the Reach of such Dangers as may be avoided, nor arm themselves against those that cannot be avoided; if *Sundays* and *Holidays* be made Days of Idleness or Pleasure, instead of Devotion; and the rest of the Week be employed in temporal Concerns or Diversifements, which draw the Heart from God; finally, if both Prayer and spiritual Reading, and the Use of the Sacraments, be almost wholly neglected, must not the same Consequence as naturally follow; viz. that very great Numbers will perish eternally, because they will not employ the ordinary Means to save their Souls? It cannot naturally be otherwise; for we cannot expect that God will assist us, unless we perform our Part, by employing the Means he has provided us with; which if we do, he will enable us to conquer the World, and triumph over all our spiritual Enemies.

The

TheXXXVIIthENTERTAINMENT

The Emptiness and Vanity of the World.

Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity. Eccl. i. 2.

SOME worldly Good, whether real or supposed, is aimed at in all the Cravings of Men's Passions; and there is no Sin committed, but the unlawful Enjoyment either of *Honour, Wealth, or Pleasure*, is the principal Incitement to it: 'Tis for these Men forfeit God's Grace, and damn themselves; tho' the very choicest of them are so despicable in themselves, that the Word of God itself has proclaimed their Emptiness and Vanity. The serious Consideration of this Truth will help to fortify the Antidotes I have already prescribed against the Love of the World, and shall therefore be the Subject of this Entertainment.

All worldly Goods may be reduced under the general Heads of *Pleasure, Greatness, Esteem*, and *Riches*: Now there are three general Circumstances, which render the Satisfaction they procure us *vain*, and by Consequence, worthy of Contempt:

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I. They

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1. They are mixed ; 2. Their Duration is short ; and, 3. They usually end in everlasting Sorrow.

To instance first, in the most general Idol of Men's Passions, and which they usually pursue with the greatest Eagerness, I mean *Pleasures* ; they either pass away quickly, and then they signify nothing, but serve only to inflame the Desire they ought to have satisfied ; or they stay long with us, and then they grow tedious, and we are sick of them : So that they either over-charge the Appetite, or leave it empty ; and the Satisfaction they procure us, is sure to delude us one Way or other.

Besides, we may consider Pleasure either as lawful or unlawful in itself ; for take it what Way you please, it has a Mixture, which lessens in some Measure the Relish of it : If it be lawful in its particular Kind, 'tis still dangerous in its general Nature, as being apt to engage the Heart too far in its Interest ; and then what is lawful in itself, may become criminal in its Excess, proportionably to the Strength of our Inclination to it : So that the Use even of lawful Pleasures is clog'd and encumber'd with so many Restraints and Precautions, as destroy a great Part of the Satisfaction we seek in the Pursuit of them.

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But if they be unlawful in their very Nature, *Disquiet* and *Remorse* of Conscience, the natural Fruit of Vice, is a Wormwood which imbitters the very sweetest Draught of Pleasure: Nay, the bare Foresight of the Punishment that is to follow, disturbs the Pleasure in the very Enjoyment; and when that is over, Shame and Remorse, like Ministers of Justice, rush in upon the Offender, and make him pay very dear for the short-liv'd Pleasure he has enjoyed. This is the Nature of worldly Pleasures; and the few Hints I have given shew plainly, that under whatever Circumstance they are considered, they can yield no Satisfaction, but what is mixed with Disappointment and Affliction of Spirit.

Greatness, the second Idol of the World, is in itself but an empty Name; and the Power or Authority annexed to it is a real Burden, which often crushes those whom it has raised: For the higher Men are in their Station, the fairer Mark they are for Envy and Malice to shoot at: If they discharge their Trust as they ought, their Life is encumber'd with Cares, and their Condition is but an honourable Slavery: If they neglect or abuse it, they are sure to be exposed; and their Infamy becomes as publick as their Station: So that

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considering the Condition of Men in Power with an impartial Eye, and weighing the Burden against the Advantage, we may truly say they commonly pay dear enough for their Greatness; and whatever secret Satisfaction it may bring with it, 'tis mixed with so great an Alloy, that they who enjoy it can never be envied by any thinking Man, and have but little Reason to be over-sord of their Condition.

Esteem, the other Darling of human Pride, is a Good full as vain, and no less mixed than the former: It consists in the favourable Opinion Men have of us; and is there any Thing so empty and precarious, so inconstant and capricious, as the Opinion of Men? They who love and esteem us To-day, will perhaps hate and despise us To-morrow: A false Report, a casual Indiscretion, a mere groundless Fancy, suffices to rob us in an Instant of all the Esteem we have been labouring to acquire for many Years.

But suppose this should not happen, what can the Opinion of Men avail us? For since Opinion is nothing but a Thought shut up within the Breasts of Men, 'tis wholly unknown to us, and can yield us no Satisfaction, but when it is manifested by some outward Token; and how little are those outward Tokens to be depended upon

upon, since they are much oftner an Effect of Flattery or Dissimulation, than Marks of a real Esteem.

Add to this, that since Esteem consists precisely in the favourable Thoughts or Judgment Men have of us, it follows, that when they cease thinking of us, their Esteem is, as it were, suspended all that Time; and, in reality, affects us no longer than whilst we are actually present to their Thoughts: And how seldom does that happen? Men, alas! are too much taken up with themselves, and their own Concerns, to apply themselves with any lasting Attention to consider the Merit or good Qualities of their Neighbour: Nay, since no Man is free from some Defect, 'tis Ten to One, that very Defect shall be uppermost in their Thoughts, and stifle the Remembrance of all the good Qualities we possess.

But let us set this favourite Idol of corrupt Nature in the very best Light it will bear; let us suppose the good Opinion Men have of us to be subject to no Caprice or Change; nay, let us raise the Value of it by all the Considerations that most flatter our Vanity, as the *Quality, sound Judgment, Sincerity, and Steadiness* of those by whom we are admired; shall we, after all, be any Thing the better for it? No, certainly: Esteem supposes indeed some Good in us, but

makes no Addition to it, leaving us, at best, but just where it found us; and 'tis happy when it does so; 'tis happy when we are no real Losers by it: For if we are too sensibly affected with it, our being esteemed by Men may occasion our being despicable in the Eyes of God; because the Vanity of being esteemed may taint the Heart; the Purity of our Intentions may be corrupted by it; we may be strongly tempted to make it our principal View; and then it must of course destroy the whole intrinsic Value of those very Qualities or Virtues for which we are esteemed: And is not that a most vain and empty Thing, which, if it be not known, can yield us no Satisfaction; and if it be known, may do us a real Mischief; and whether it be known or not, makes us neither wiser, nor perfecter, nor better Men, than we are without it?

Finally, *Riches*, the most coveted of worldly Goods, could never yet procure to any Man a full and unmix'd Satisfaction: For they are neither kept without Solitude, nor lost without Disquiet and Vexation of Mind. But suppose a Man to be above the Reach of ordinary Accidents, suppose him in a quiet and secure Possession of a plentiful Fortune, daily Experience is but too convincing a Proof that
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Happiness and Riches are not always join'd together; and that melancholy Looks, uneasy Hearts, and Discontents are to be found in the large Houses of the Rich as well as in the poorest Cottage. How few are there in the World, whose Content increases with their Wealth; or rather how few are there, whose Riches are not the very Occasion of their Discontents!

Some, through an unaccountable Unhappiness of Temper, suffer all the Inconveniences of Want in the very midst of Plenty; because, tho' Riches come daily flowing in upon them, they have not the Hearts to enjoy them; and so they have no other Share in the Possession of Wealth, than the bare Incumbrance of it. Others again, tho' Masters of a plentiful Fortune, are ever uneasy, because there lives one near, who has a better Estate than they; and the Discontent of these is as real, as if the greater Fortune of their Neighbour swallow'd up effectually a Part of theirs: Others, in fine, are ever enlarging their Desires, in Proportion to the increase of their Wealth; and 'tis impossible these should ever be content; because the Thing that is to make them so is always in Reversion. We may then conclude from these few obvious Instances, and the Chearfulness we usually observe in Persons of a middle
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State, that Riches either occasion, or at least cure not an uneasy Mind : And that by Consequence, the Satisfaction they procure us, is far from being pure and unmix'd.

The second Circumstance, that renders the Joys of this World truly vain, and worthy of Contempt, is the *Shortness* of their Duration. To comprehend this well, we need but reflect, that there is not any one Pleasure in this World, that can possibly last for any considerable space of Time: For we may truly say of all worldly Pleasures what *Solomon* says of Riches, *that they make Wings to themselves*; that is, that they are instrumental to their own Destruction: Because all Pleasures whatsoever, by exceeding a certain Limit of Time, cease to be Pleasures, destroy themselves, and become a Torment even to the greatest Lovers of them.

'Tis true, Variety of Pleasures may in some Measure relieve the Taste, and take off some Part of their Tedioufness: But who can pretend to pass his whole Life in a continual and uninterrupted Course of Pleasures? Let a Man study with all the Art and Industry imaginable to gratify his Inclinations; natural Indispositions on the one Hand, and crossing Accidents on the other, will give him frequent Stops and
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Interruptions; and by Consequence his Pleasures will always be considerably shorter than his Life; which Reflection may serve to give us a true Idea of their shortness. For alas! what is Man's Life? The *Royal Prophet* compares it to a *fading Flower*, fresh in the Morning, and wither'd before Night. St. *James* calls it a *Vapour*, that rises and vanishes in a Moment. And yet this fading Flower, this momentary Vapour is of a much longer Duration, than the Pleasures of this World can possibly be, in Reference to any particular Person.

For in the first Place, Man's Infancy is a Part of Life altogether incapable of Pleasure. The same may also be said of his decrepit Years; which the Scripture calls a Time of *Labour* and *Sorrow*, and is commonly term'd a second Childhood; but with this unhappy Difference, that it has a perfect Sense of all its Miseries: So that whereas the whole Course of Man's Life is commonly divided into four Parts; to wit, his Childhood, Youth, middle and old Age; two of the four are almost wholly incapable of Pleasure. His first Years pass in a total Ignorance of what Pleasure is, and his latter Years are most made up of Crosses and Sufferings. If he dies soon, the shortness of his Life permits him not to enjoy the World; and if

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he lives long, Life itself becomes a Burden to him : So that you see the very longest Course of Pleasures a Man can propose to himself, is already shorter than his Life, by a considerable Number of Years.

Now as to his Youth and middle Age, the two Parts of Man's Life which alone are capable of Pleasure ; we must also ~~also~~ allow for many Gaps, and make such large Abatements, as will reduce the Duration of his Pleasures to a very narrow Compass of Time. Little less than one full Third is commonly allow'd for Sleep; during which the poorest Beggar is as happy as the happiest Monarch in the World ; or to speak more properly, the greatest Voluptuary laid on a Bed of Down, has no more Pleasure than the Beggar in his Barn : For Sleep is the Image of Death, in which all Conditions are alike ; or rather we are as if we were not, being under a total Suspension both of Pain and Pleasure.

But if to this long vacancy of Pleasure, which Nature daily challenges, we add all casual Indispositions, and a thousand Accidents, to which Man's Life is exposed ; we shall find the necessary Abatements to be allow'd for Stops and Interruptions, even in the smoothest Course of Pleasures,
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will run away with so large a Portion, even of that Part of Life which alone is capable of them; that how short soever Man's Life is in itself, the Duration of his Pleasures, tho' pursued with all the Art and Application imaginable, will not amount, in the whole, to a third Part of it.

It was upon the experimental Knowledge of these Truths, *Salomon* grounded that solemn Declaration transmitted to us in holy Writ, of the *Vanity* of all earthly Things: And truly, if a Man was ever qualified to be a Judge in any Case, *Salomon* is one above all Exception, in the Point in Question. He mounted his Father's Throne, when he was yet very Young, and possess'd it to a great Age: All which Time passed in an uninterrupted Course of the greatest Prosperity. Nothing was in Appearance wanting to make him not only the greatest Prince, but happiest Man in the World. He was both loved and fear'd by his own Subjects, and respected far and near as an Oracle of Wisdom.

Riches came flowing to him in such Abundance, that during his Reign, Silver was no more valued than Heaps of Stone; and as Money commands all Things, so it furnished him with all the Variety of Pleasures his Wit could invent, or Passions incline him to, which he never denied

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any Thing, but studied to indulge and gratify in all they could desire, as he writes of ~~of~~ himself. Nor do we read that any considerable Affliction or cross Accident happened to him in the whole Course of his Reign: Yet all this notwithstanding, he was so far from being satisfied with the World, that the long Experience he had had of its Prosperity served only to convince him of its Emptiness, and oblige him to proclaim to all Mankind that all its Enjoyments are but *Vanity and Affliction of Spirit*. Good God! What a poor wretched Thing is this World; since with all its store of *Wealth, Greatness, Esteem and Pleasures* it cannot so much as make one single Man happy!

However, there remains one Circumstance more, which renders all earthly Joys not only worthy of Contempt, but even of our Hatred and Aversion; to wit, that *they usually end in everlasting Sorrow*. Our Saviour has delivered this Truth in these express Terms, *Wo be to you that laugh now, for ye shall weep*: And in the Parable or Relation of the different Ends of *Dives* and *Lazarus*, one Reason expressly alledged why the one was damn'd, and the other saved, is because the rich Glutton had enjoyed the Pleasures of this Life, and *Lazarus* had suffered great Afflictions. *My*
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Son (says *Abraham* to *Dives*) *remember that thou in thy Life-time didst receive good Things, and Lazarus evil Things: But now he is comforted and thou art tormented: So that the Pleasures of this World, if the Heart be set upon them, are but the Seeds of everlasting Torments: And as they who sow in Tears have God's Promise that they shall one Day reap in Joy; so they who now sow in Joy, that is, pursue the Pleasures of this World with an immoderate Love, can expect no better Fate, than to reap hereafter in Tears and Sorrow.*

It was the Consideration of this Truth kept the Royal Prophet steady in his Belief of an all-ruling Providence; when, as himself declares, his Faith was ready to stagger at the Prosperity of Sinners, and the Sufferings of the Just: For he no sooner considered their different Ends, *viz.* the Joys that crown the Sufferings of the Just, and the endless Miseries that follow the short Joys of the Wicked, but his disturbed Thoughts were immediately calm'd, and all his Doubts of Providence fully satisfied.

However, we must not infer from thence, that temporal Goods are not God's Blessings, or that we ought not to be thankful for them: They are certainly his Blessings, and challenge a Return of Gratitude: But they are a sort of Blessings, which our cor-
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rupt Nature makes always dangerous, and for the most part, fatal to our Souls: *First*, because they are apt to swell us with Pride, and a vain Conceit of ourselves: *Secondly*, because finding them agreeable, we easily set our Hearts upon them, and even love them with a Preference to our eternal Good: And *Thirdly*, because we usually make them the Instruments of our Passions, and instead of employing them to God's greater Honour and Glory, we use them as Means to procure to ourselves those unlawful Pleasures, which the divine Justice is obliged to punish hereafter.

For these Reasons, which are but too well grounded upon daily Experience, and the common Practice of Mankind, our Saviour pronounced this terrible Sentence, *that it is easier for a Camel to pass through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. The same Reasons drew also from him those heavy Woes against the Rich, which one would think should suffice to hinder any Man from desiring or envying their Condition. Not that the bare Possession of Riches renders us in any Manner criminal in the Sight of God: Nay, if we will but ourselves, we may make them very instrumental to our future Happiness; particularly by distributing liberal Alms amongst
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the Poor, by employing them in the Comfort of the afflicted, and finally, by making them a Support of the Cause and Interest of Religion. But this good Management is so little practised in the World, and the Abuse of them flows so naturally from our inbred Corruption, that very few make them serve for any other Purpose than to purchase for themselves those vain Joys which corrupt the Heart, and terminate in course in everlasting Sorrow. Whence it follows, that those who have Wealth, ought daily to pray God to give them Grace to use it well; and those who have it not, have Reason to praise him for being out of the Reach of a Temptation, by which Thousands have perished.

T H E

XXXVIIIth ENTERTAINMENT.

Some practical Inferences drawn from
the foregoing Truth.

*What shall it profit a Man, if he shall gain
the whole World, and lose his own Soul?*
Mark viii. 36.

HAVING in my last Discourse laid before you the Emptiness and Vanity of Worldly Goods, it remains now to improve this Truth by drawing some practical Consequences from it; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

From the two first Circumstances of earthly Goods, it plainly follows, that it is a great Folly to set our Hearts upon any Thing in this World. For, who but a Fool would engage his Affections, where he is sure to meet with Disappointments? And what can we else expect from Things made up of a greater Mixture of Evil than Good, and which therefore, must of Course give greater Vexation than Content?

If we ever yet had heard of any Man, who own'd himself perfectly satisfied in the Enjoyment of this World, we should have
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some Encouragement to hope the same. But since even those, who in all Appearance were as happy as the World could make them, have ever acknowledged their Dissatisfaction, and the Want of something to fill up the Measure of the imaginary Happiness they proposed to themselves; is it not an Extravagance and Folly, either to promise ourselves what no Man before us ever could arrive at, or set our Hearts upon Things, which we know before-hand will deceive us? For since Content is the only End we pursue in all our Desires of worldly Enjoyments; if it be evident, that they are not able to secure this to us, there appears nothing in them worth the engaging our Affections; and to set our Hearts upon them, is to act without Sense or Reason.

However, let us now suppose the Joys of this World could give us a perfect Content, at least whilst they lasted; this notwithstanding would not excuse us from being guilty of Folly in setting our Hearts upon them, by reason of the shortness of their Duration, and the unavoidable Necessity of their ending at last in Death. The Reason is, because it is certainly a Folly to create to ourselves an unnecessary Grief and Trouble. Now this is the infallible Consequence of setting our Hearts upon

any Thing, that will be some Time or other taken from us : For whatsoever we love and enjoy with Delight, we always lose with Regret; and the Greatness of our Pleasure in the Possession is the Measure of our Grief in the Loss.

Whence it is, that they who have their Hearts disengaged, enjoy a perfect Peace, which neither Losses, nor Disappointments can destroy : Nay, in Relation to these, Death itself loses its Sting; whereas it has a double one to those, whose Hearts are fast link'd to the World; and their Separation from it is like tearing off a Limb : So that to cherish an inordinate Love to any Thing is in Effect to take a Delight in working out the Chains that are to load us, and preparing the Instruments that are to torment us. *O Death* (says the Wiseman) *how bitter is thy Remembrance to a Man who places his Repose in the Enjoyment of his Wealth!* And truly 'tis no Wonder that Death should be to such a one a most bitter Cup, whether he looks back upon what he is to part with, or forward upon what is to be his future Lot; which to a Lover of this World can be nothing else but a state of everlasting Sorrow.

However, it does not follow hence, but that every one is bound to use a reasonable Care in the Management of his temporal Concerns :

Concerns : And in many Cases he is bound to it not only by the Rules of Prudence, but by the Law of Justice. As for Instance, A Person to whom an Estate comes by Inheritance, seems to be under a natural Obligation of Justice, to endeavour, as far as in him lies, to leave it to his next Heir as good as he found it ; because his Heir seems to have the same Title to the Reversion, as he has to the Possession of it for Life : And therefore Parents in this Case ought to look upon themselves as Trustees and Guardians of their Children before God ; to whom they will be certainly accountable for their Administration. But there is another Consideration of no less Weight to induce them to it : For 'tis a Thing of the greatest Importance, to keep up a Family ; to which great Numbers by the Disposition of Providence are owing for their daily Bread, and which is as a common Refuge and Sanctuary to all the Persecuted and Distressed, who must all be ruined of course with the Ruin of the Family, by which they are supported.

Now, since the very best Estate may either moulder away by Neglect, or be ruined by Extravagance ; it follows, that a reasonable Care and Attention is necessary for the Preservation of it : And tho' this Concern takes up a great Part of a Man's Thoughts,

it is not what, in Scripture-language, is called *the Love of Riches*, or what I call *the setting our Hearts upon them*; because it is consistent with a true Christian Contempt of them, which excludes not a moderate Concern, but an immoderate Affection for them: So that if, in a Time of Trial, a Person is ready to sacrifice all for God's Cause, rather than offend him mortally, 'tis a manifest Proof, that tho' his Riches have a Part in his Thoughts, God Almighty has the first Place in his Heart.

It follows, *secondly*, that what has been said against the Love of earthly Things, hinders us not from cherishing certain Inclinations impress'd by Nature, and conformable to the Order of Providence; such as the Love of Parents for their Children, and the mutual Love of married Persons: These Inclinations, tho' attended with a Tenderness, which seems to be a strong Bias upon the Heart, are not only lawful, but necessary; for Parents are bound to love their Children, and Persons engaged in the Bonds of Wedlock are bound to love each other; and the Tenderness which naturally attends it, is but a stronger Cement, intended by the Author of Nature to render it more firm and lasting, and make the many indispensable Duties annexed

noxxed to their State fall in agreeably with their Inclinations.

However, this Love has also its Bounds; for tho' the Parents be allowed to have a Tendernefs for their Children, and married Persons to love each other above any Thing in this World, yet their Love must take care to stop there; for if it goes farther, it becomes inordinate; because the Love of God admits neither of Superior nor Rival: So that if any Thing pretends to dispute the Place with him, or Preference to him, 'tis manifest that, in this Case, our very tenderest Inclinations must be sacrificed to our Duty. 'Tis true, the Heart is divided in the Case supposed, as St. Paul teaches in these Words: *He who is married, is solicitous for the Things of this World, how he may please his Wife, and he is divided*; 1 Cor. vii. 33. But the Division is far from being equal: God has always a Sovereign Right over the whole Heart; and whatever Share is allowed to Husband, Wife, Children, or any other Thing of this World, 'tis no more than a subordinate or relative Love, limited by the Law of God, and bound to pay an entire Obedience to all its Orders.

I come now to my second Inference, which I draw from the third Circumstance of earthly Joys, viz. *Their ending in everlasting*

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lasting Sorrow ; and conclude from it, that those, whose narrow Circumstances exclude them from enjoying the Pleasures of the World, or even oblige them to earn their Bread with hard Labour, have no Reason to repine, as they usually do, at their Condition : For if we judge of Things by the Principles of Faith, we shall find their Complaints and Murmurs as unreasonable as the Outcries of Madmen, who are angry at their Keepers for taking away from them the Things wherewith they would destroy themselves. I own, if there were no other World to be looked for, their Circumstances would be very hard ; but since this Life is but a Passage to a better one to come, that Condition ought to be esteemed the best, which is the safest Way to it : For what Traveller would not prefer a safe Road before a pleasant one beset with many and almost unavoidable Dangers ?

Now this is a faithful Representation of the two different States of the Poor and Rich : The Way of the Rich is pleasant and diverting, but full of Snares and Temptations ; and the great Numbers of those that perish in it, is a clear Proof, that very few are either watchful enough to avoid the one, or have Virtue enough to resist the other. *They who will become rich,* says St.

St. Paul, fall into Temptations; and the Snares of the Devil; and into many unprofitable and hurtful Lusts, which sink Men into Destruction and Perdition. The Poor are, on the contrary, in a rough and unpleasant Way, and their Condition exposes them to many Hardships: But their Suffering is their Security; it preserves them from the Love of the World; it keeps them in an humble Disposition; it puts them under a happy Necessity of doing Penance for their Sins; finally, it removes from them the Means and Opportunities of gratifying their natural Passions: All which are very great Advantages, and serve as Fences to keep Danger at a Distance, and secure their Passage to a better Life: So that the Poor, whatever Hardships they endure, have but little Reason to complain of their Condition; since the Ground of all their Discontents and Murmurs seems to be no other, than that Providence has taken care to remove the greatest Obstacles of Salvation out of their Way, and to have put it in a great Measure out of their Power to lose themselves for ever.

I know these Reasons make but little Impression upon Men that are worldly given; because, being strongly affected with what is present, and looking upon the Life to come as a Thing at a great

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Distance, they are willing to let the World take its Chance, so they enjoy themselves in this : They are entirely persuaded, that a Life of Holiness is the safest Way to Heaven ; but, a painful one, they would rather be at Ease in the Broad-way, let the End be what it will, than to work and strive on for Salvation. But, O good God, what a strange Infatuation is this ! a Blindness, to prefer the short Pleasures of a perishable Life before eternal : estimable Joys ! Nay, to purchase with endless and unspeakable Torments. Most certainly either they are mistaken, or Christ was mistaken in telling us, *profits a Man nothing to gain the World, if he loses his Soul* : For the whole World imports a great deal, : far more than any single Man could make himself Master of : Nay, the Kingdom or Empire in it, is but a Part, if compared with the whole.

Suppose then, that any one single Man should become absolute Master of : all the wealthy Kingdoms, States, and Empires it contains, would all this profit him no more if he should lose his Soul ? No, not at all : Nay, he would lose infinitely more : The Reason is, because the Value of the Soul is infinite : The World with all its Greatness, Wealth, Pom-

Pleasures, must have an End; but the Loss of the Soul is eternal and irreparable: And what can it profit a Man to purchase Pleasures, which must certainly end, with the Loss of Joys that will never end? What can it profit him, to have enjoyed the World for a certain Number of Years, and when this Term of Time is expired, to pass to everlasting Torments? Suppose a Man had lived in an uninterrupted Course of Pleasures from the Creation of the World to this very Day, and that the fatal Moment were now come to bid an everlasting Farewell to all those Pleasures, and begin an unhappy Eternity; Alas! What would the past Enjoyments of Pleasures avail him? What would it profit him to have lived great; to have had the World at Command; to have indulged his Senses in every Thing he could desire; if, after all, he must not only see the End of all this temporal Felicity, but pass from it to a State of endless Misery and Torments? 'Tis certain, his Condition would be no better, in Reference to the Time past, than if his whole Life had passed in a Dream: Nay, the Remembrance of past Pleasures would rather aggravate, than mitigate his Misfortune.

Whence it appears, how senseless Men are, to hazard their Salvation for the En-

joyment only of such Pleasures as the narrow Compass of a private Fortune will afford them: For if the gaining even of the whole World, with all its Riches, Poms, and Pleasures, be no Manner of Equivalent or Compensation for the Loss of their Souls, what Madness is it then to throw away this precious Treasure for so small and inconsiderable a Part of it, as bears no Manner of Proportion to the whole?

Hence also we may gather, how much they are to be lamented, who, to gratify some one single Passion, forfeit all their Title to eternal Happiness. The Case I speak of is theirs, who, having otherwise a Sense of God and Religion, are however, through natural Temper and Custom, enslaved to some one particular Vice, and have no other Impediment to obstruct their Way to Salvation. Now, since even those are pronounced unhappy, who should lose their Souls to gain the whole World; how deplorable then is their Case, who lose their Souls, not for a full Enjoyment of all the Pleasures the whole World can afford, but for the miserable Satisfaction of gratifying every now and then that single Inclination, which tyrannizes over them? And even that too with such After-gripes and Remorses of a troubled Conscience, as utterly

terly destroy those very Pleasures for which they expose themselves to everlasting Torments? Alas! poor Wretches! they make themselves eternally miserable in the Life to come, and they cease not to be unhappy in this World: They lose Heaven, and get in a Manner nothing for it; for whoever continues a Slave to any one Passion, renounces his Claim to future Happiness as effectually, as if he laboured under all the deadly Sins; and Heaven is equally lost, whether one parts with it for a single Farthing, or a thousand Millions; whether a Kingdom, or a Cup of Drink, is received in Exchange for it.

Whoever therefore is in this Condition, let him consider the unhappy Circumstances of his State, and the Wrong he does himself; let him consider, whether the Pleasure he takes in committing that Sin, to which he is inclined, be worth the losing his Soul for ever? Whether the Satisfaction it affords him be a Recompence for the Loss of Heaven? Finally, whether it can make him any tolerable Amends for the endless and irreparable Evils it draws upon him? Alas! how infinitely disproportion'd is it either to the Happiness it deprives him of, or the Miseries it betrays him to!

Suppose an Hour's Pleasure were us, upon Condition, that the new we should endure the Rack, would willing to hearken to such a Proposal dare confidently say, if Pleasures to be purchased, but upon these we should find but few Pretenders; and yet the Pain and Pleasure in it supposed would have a Proportion to their Quality and Duration: What Time, tho' never so long, can be compared to Eternity; nor can the End of this Life bear any Proportion to the Torments of the Life to come: Madness is it then to make the Price of the other?

But to return once more to those who are chiefly concerned in the consequence of this Reflection, their Circumstances are such, that, do what they can, they can never promise themselves a great Share in the Pleasures of this World; for they can never hope to become Rich or Great, nor by consequence to enjoy the World in any considerable Degree: And suppose they had it in their Power to make themselves both Rich and Great, with the Loss of their Souls, it would be nothing less than a desperation to do it, as I have clearly shewn since God's Providence has so

Things for them, as to put them out of the Reach of this Temptation ; since he has been pleased to confine them within such narrow Circumstances, as oblige them to earn their Bread with the Sweat of their Brows ; in a word, since they have no Prospect before them of any better Condition than that of a painful and laborious Life, what is there in this World, as it regards Persons under their Circumstances, should tempt them to lose their Souls ?

It is true, they may have the Pleasure of Cursing and Swearing ; they may perhaps afford to be drunk sometimes ; they may murmur against God ; they may please themselves with defaming their Neighbour ; or revenging themselves as well as they can of their Enemies ; but is it not a lamentable Case to damn their Souls for some such despicable and wretched Satisfaction ? Is it not a deplorable Thing to renounce their Claim to Heaven, for the very Dregs and Outcasts of sinful Pleasures ; where-with, when they have now gratified corrupt Nature to the very utmost of their Power, they are still poor, and ever like to be so : They must still drudge on, and gain their Living with hard Toil and Labour : So that by continuing under any of those Habits of Cursing, Swearing, De-tracting, Drinking, or the like, what do they

they else but lose the Fruits of their many Sufferings in this Life, and themselves liable to everlasting Torments hereafter? They cannot but be so in this World; but if they will but use a right Use of their Sufferings, they will be infinitely happy in the next: And by their Impatience, and neglecting God as they ought, according to their State, they take the direct Course from the Sufferings of the one, to the Torments of the other.

But to conclude; I say once whatever a Man's Circumstances are in this World, tho' he be in a Condition to enjoy all its Pleasures, he is infinitely miserable if he loses his Soul; because it is the Loss of an infinite Good, joined with unspeakable Torments, but 'tis a Loss that can never be repaired.

The XXXIXth ENTERTAINMENT.

The Happiness that attends a virtuous Life.

A good Conscience is a continual Feast.

Prov. xv. 15.

TH O' Sin ought to be detested chiefly, because it is an Offence of God, yet there are many other inferior Motives to induce us to it; and all sorts of Weapons may lawfully be made Use of against the Enemy of God and our Souls. If Love alone be too weak to keep us from being overcome by it, the Fear both of present and future Evils, or any other rational Motive, whether it regards our present Ease, or future Happiness, may be called in to our Assistance: The Terrors of God's Judgments have prepared the Way for the Conversion of many enormous Sinners; and the Uneasiness of a galled and fretted Conscience has forced many more to seek that solid Comfort in the Practice of Virtue, of which they always found themselves disappointed in the Pursuit of unlawful Pleasures.

This then is the Consideration I shall at present lay before you, to excite you to a Hatred of Sin, and the Practice of Virtue: I mean, the Happiness it procures us even
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in this World. I shall endeavour to convince You, that there is no true Happiness upon Earth, but what is grounded upon the Testimony of a good Conscience. and the Practice of an innocent and virtuous Life ; that a Christian, truly virtuous, cannot but be truly Happy : And finally, that neither the Pleasures of this World can give Ease to a bad Conscience, nor its Sufferings trouble the Repose of a good one. This I shall endeavour to make out in two Discourses by shewing, *First*, that Nothing renders Man's Life so comfortable in itself, as the Practice of solid Virtue ; and *Secondly*, That it even sweetens all the necessary Troubles and Sufferings of human Life. The first of these two Truths, *viz.* that Nothing renders Man's Life so comfortable in itself, as the Practice of Virtue, shall be the whole Subject of this Entertainment.

Among the many Arguments, the Royal Prophet makes Use of to encourage us to the Love of Virtue, there is scarce any he insists more frequently upon, or sets off with greater Eloquence than the Sweetness and many Comforts himself had experienced in the Practice of it. *How great, O Lord,* (says he, Psalm xxx.) *is the Multitude of thy Sweetness, which thou hast hid for them that love thee !* The Commandments
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of the Lord, (says the same Prophet) are just, rejoicing the Heart. They are more to be desired than Gold; sweeter also than Honey, or the Honey-comb. And again, in the 118th Psalm, he expresses the Delight he had in the Observance of them. *I have been delighted (says he) in the Way of thy Testimonies, as much in all Riches: I have loved thy Commandments above Gold, and precious Stones.* But lest we should be unwilling to depend upon his bare Testimony, in his 33d Psalm, he invites all to taste and see how sweet the Lord is. And truly tho' the Authority of this holy Prophet suffices to convince our speculative Judgment, nothing but an experimental Knowledge can give us a feeling Sense of this Truth. 'Tis only *Seeing* and *Tasting* can give us a true Idea of the Heavenly Comforts, God bestows upon his faithful Servants in this Life.

For such is the Goodness of our most bountiful Lord, that not content to reward Virtue in the Life to come, he is pleased to give us, even in this Vale of Tears, some Antipasts of the incomprehensible Joys, which are the everlasting Portion of the Saints in Heaven. His fatherly Tenderness will not suffer him to let us live in bare Hopes of future Joys, without providing also in some Measure for our present Happiness. For he knows we are Travel-
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lers in this Life, and in danger of Fainting on the Way, without the Help of some Refreshments to keep up our Spirits. And therefore least our natural Sloth should make our Journey to Heaven seem over-painful to us, he has so twisted together our Happiness and our Duty, that as it is impossible to be truly happy, without doing our Duty, so is it no less impossible to do our Duty without being truly Happy. *Who* (says holy *Job*) *ever resisted God, and had Peace?* And we may ask as confidently, *Who ever obey'd God, and had not Peace?* That Peace, I say, which (as *St. Paul* tells us) *surpasses all human Sense*, and makes the Soul enjoy a Kind of Heaven upon Earth. For 'tis certain this hidden Treasure is only to be found in the Practice of a virtuous Life, and is wholly inconsistent with a Conscience labouring under the Guilt of mortal Sin.

St. Austin, who first experienced the Uneasiness of a Conscience burden'd with Sin, and afterwards the sweetness of a holy Life, is the best Judge in this Case. This holy Saint had many Years together truckled under the Tyranny of his Passions: But God Almighty being *mercifully severe* to him, as himself expresses it, would not let him enjoy one Moment's true Content in that unhappy State; but was incessantly calling upon him by the inward Murmurs, Uneasiness, and Reproaches of a disturbed Con-

Conscience. However, as nothing is more apt to increase the Violence of a Passion, or rivet it more deeply in the Soul than often yielding to it, his Inclination to carnal Pleasures became at length so prevalent, and gain'd so absolute a Power over him, that he even grew in Love with his Slavery, and was afraid to be deliver'd from his Chains, tho' they gall'd and tortured him without Intermision.

But as soon as God's Grace had wrought a thorough Change in his Heart, and rescued him from the powerful Charm, that had held him so long captive, Oh, then he spoke another Language : Virtue then appear'd no longer the frightful Thing he had formerly imagined it to be : The State of Continency, which before seem'd full of insuperable Difficulties, and inconsistent with all Comfort of Life, became so sweet and charming, that it gave him a Disgust of all his former Pleasures ; as himself acknowledges to God in these pious Words. *O my God, my Helper and Redeemer, how delightful it became all on a sudden to be deprived of those Pleasures, which before I courted with so much Passion! I then renounced with Joy, what formerly I fear'd to lose. For thou O Lord, didst cast them out from me. Thou, who art the only true and sovereign Sweetness, thou didst cast them out from me, and thou enter'd'st in their Place*

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Place; thou, I say, who art sweet above all Pleasure.

No doubt but he is so to all that love and serve him with their whole Hearts. His blessed Sight completes our Happiness in Heaven, and his Presence to our Souls by Grace, begins it here on Earth. He is our Crown at the End of our Race, and our Comfort and Refreshment during the Toils and Labours of it. The Tenderness Almighty God has for his Children is so great, that he thinks every Thing but himself, is too little to make them happy in this World: And since their Love of him, tho' not yet purified from all Mixture of earthly Allay, is of the same Nature with that of the Saints above; his Will is, that their Reward shall also bear some Resemblance with theirs, and be at least some small Drops of that full Torrent of Delights, which is reserved for the Life to come. So that what is said of Heavenly Joys, *that the Eye has not seen, nor the Ear heard, what God has prepared for those that love him*; is, in some Measure, applicable to the inward Joy, Content and Peace of Mind, which is the usual Reward of Virtue in this Life. For what a Joy and Comfort must it needs be to a Christian, to bear within himself the Testimony of a good Conscience; which, in the Words
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of my Text is call'd a *continual Feast*! being always attended with a firm Confidence in the Favour and Protection of Almighty God in this Life, and the Hopes of a joyful Eternity hereafter. This doubtless is a Happiness, which truly deserves our Esteem and Value; a Happiness, which surpasses all the Pleasures of this World: Finally, a Happiness, which nothing but a virtuous Life can effectually procure us.

But if we search into the original Cause of this interior Comfort of a Soul in Grace, I can discover no other than what is express'd in this celebrated Sentence of *St. Austin. Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thy own Self; and our Hearts are Restless till they repose in thee.* For since all created Things have a natural Tendency to the End for which they are created, and are under a kind of Constraint and Violence, whilst they are withheld or diverted from pursuing that End; it follows, that the Soul of Man being created to enjoy Almighty God, cannot but have, as it were, a natural Propensity and Tendency towards him, and must needs be restless and dissatisfied, till she be united to him.

It is true indeed, as long as she is confined to the Body, she cannot attain to that perfect Union, which alone can satisfy her boundless Desires, and render her complet-

pletely happy. However, tho' she cannot now attain to this perfect Union, as being the proper Blessing of the Life to come, and the ultimate End of her Creation; yet there is one of a lower Degree; whereof she is capable in the Interim, and which is absolutely necessary to fit her for the other. The Union I speak of is that which is now made by *Grace*; and will hereafter be perfected by *Glory*. And tho' this Union by Grace be of a Degree much inferiour to the other, yet being proportion'd to her present State, and the only one she is now capable of, it cannot but give her a true and solid Content; since by Virtue of it, the Soul is not only fitted for that perfect and everlasting Fruition of Almighty God, which is her ultimate Felicity, and the full Accomplishment of all her Desires, but she is likewise put into an actual Possession of him; because to be united to God by Grace, is really to possess him as much as we are capable of in this Life.

And tho' this Possession of him cannot fully satiate the boundless Appetite of the Soul, nor fix her in a perfect Rest, and Acquiescence, because it leaves her still in a longing Desire of, and farther Tendency to a much more perfect Fruition of him; it contents her at least in such a Degree, as the Imperfection of her State will admit. 'Tis
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of the Nature of an Antipast, which stays the Stomach tho' it fills it not: 'Tis as a Cordial which keeps up her fainting Spirits, and enables her to walk on chearfully to the desired End of her painful Pilgrimage: It delivers her not indeed from all Concern, Apprehensions and Fears; nor is it expedient it should; because our State requires that we should *work out our Salvation in Fear and Trembling*; but it balances them with an equal Counter-poise of Hope, so as to keep her from sinking under her Fears: It moderates their Excess, and frees her in a great Measure from the anxious and uneasy Part of them: In a Word, it renders the Soul as happy, as her Condition, under the Confinement of a sinful and corruptible Body, will permit.

But, as our being created to enjoy Almighty God, is the true Reason of the solid Comfort the Soul has in being now united to him by Grace; so is it also the Reason, why Nothing, without him, can yield us any true Content; and why our Hearts are always restless, uneasy, and dissatisfy'd with whatever this World can afford, if Almighty God be not found in it: For how is it possible a Soul, created to enjoy an infinite Good, should rest satisfied with meer Shadows of Felicity? How is possible but she must be under a
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continual Restlessness and Agitation, until he, in whom all true Happiness centers, has fix'd her upon a solid Foundation! No, Christians; since God has had the Goodness to create us for himself, He has taken Care to frame our Nature so, that nothing but himself shall ever make us happy: And do we not find by Experience, that after the Practice of any Mortification for the Love of God, or the faithful Performance of the Duties of a Christian Life, we rest infinitely more content and satisfy'd at Heart, then when we have made it our whole Business and Study to gratify our Inclinations? Nay do we not find, that whatever Pleasure this World procures us, tho' never so exquisite or artfully contrived, it never yields a lasting Satisfaction, but vanishes like a Vapour, and leaves the Soul as void and empty as it found her?

And what can be the Reason hereof; but because the Practice of Virtue is a Means to unite us to God; and the Pleasures of this World remove us at a Distance from him? Whence, the Soul being conscious to herself, that earthly Delights are so far from promoting her true Happiness, that they are a real Obstacle to it, she cannot possibly find a solid Comfort in them. 'Tis true, the Pleasures of this World may gratify the Senses, but can never content
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the Heart; they may serve for a Sort of pleasing Amusement, but can never afford a lasting Satisfaction; nay what is more, they generally cloy and surfeit even those, that are the fondest of them; and when they are gone off, seldom fail to leave a heavy Heart behind.

And therefore the holy Ghost, by the Pen of the Wise-Man, represents the Damn'd in Hell venting their Despair, and condemning their past criminal Pleasures in these remarkable Words: *We have been wearied in the Ways of Iniquity and Perdition, and we have walk'd hard Ways:* Whence it appears, that how pleasing soever the broad Way that leads to Hell, may appear to Flesh and Blood; it wants not it's Thorns, which often wound the Heart in it's most sensible Part, and render it very uneasy under the gayest Outside; whereas the Practice of Virtue, tho' hard and difficult in Appearance, is sweet and comfortable in the Bottom, and always attended with true Joy, content, and Satisfaction.

Virtue indeed, like bitter Draughts, is somewhat disrelishing to Sense; but brings always with it Health and Soundness to the Mind: It begins sometimes in *Tears*, but always ends in *Joy*. There is indeed some Pain and Trouble to be undergone in sowing the first Seeds of Virtue, and weeding

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weeding out our sinful Inclinations ; but this small Trouble is afterwards rewarded with a plentiful Harvest of solid Comfort. The purifying of the Soul from all it's peccant Humors, as well as that of the Body, cannot but be attended with some Trouble and Inconvenience ; but the Pleasure of Health, that follows it, is an abundant Compensation for the one as well as the other.

Oh ! Can there be a greater Satisfaction to a Christian, than, when the Day is over, to sit down with the Testimony of a good Conscience, and this Heart-comforting Thought ; I have done nothing to Day, wherewith my Conscience can reproach me : I have perform'd all my Duties ; I resisted this Temptation ; I avoided that Occasion of Sin ; I master'd my Passion, when I was so and so provoked ! Such a Consciousness afford a Comfort, that surpasses all the Pleasures of this World ; fixes the Soul in a true Christian Peace, and prepares her for the everlasting repose of the Saints in Heaven.

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THE XLth ENTERTAINMENT.

Virtue sweetens all the Sufferings of
human Life.

My Yoke is sweet and my Burden Light.
Math. xi. 30.

OUR Saviour calls the evangelical Law a *Yoke*, and a *Burden*, because the Observance of it is painful to corrupt Nature, consider'd as such: For corrupt Nature loves Ease, Liberty, and Pleasures; but the evangelical Law recommends Labour, Watchfulness, and Penance: Corrupt Nature inclines us to Pride; but the evangelical Law pronounces it to be a mortal Poison to the Soul: Finally, corrupt Nature is the Source of an inordinate Love, by which it seeks itself in every Thing; but the evangelical Law commands us to deny ourselves, to take up our Cross and follow Christ. And how then can the *Yoke of Christ* be call'd *sweet*, and *his Burden light*? Since it is so contrary to all the Inclinations, that are born with us.

But we may as well ask, how can that
Meat be good and savoury in itself,
which

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which is not relish'd by a depraved Palate; or at which a foul Stomach nauseates? For as in this Case, the Fault is not in the Meat, but in the Stomach, so is it in the Duties commanded by the Gospel. If they be disrelishing, if they seem a Grievance to Nature, it's our Corruption makes them so: The Palate of the Soul is depraved by some vicious Inclinations, and therefore cannot tast the Sweetness of a Virtuous Life; whereas pious Christians, who by subduing their Passions have raised themselves above Flesh and Blood, find a solid Comfort in the Practice of it, as I have clearly proved in my former Discourse; wherein I shew'd, that nothing renders Man's Life so comfortable in itself as the Practice of Virtue: And tho' this alone be a convincing Proof of this sacred Truth, viz. *That the Yoke of Christ is sweet, and his Burden light*, I shall now proceed to shew farther, that his Yoke is not only sweet in itself, but that it even sweetens all the necessary Sufferings of human Life; which shall be the Subject of this Entertainment.

St. *Austin* compares the Yoke of Christ to the Wings of Birds; which are a Weight indeed, but such as bears them up: *Take away*, says he, *this Weight, and they cannot fly; let them have it, and they can fly;*
Such

Such is the Yoke of Christ? it is carried by us, and it carries us. So that whereas other Burdens press us down, the Yoke of Christ is of a quite different Nature: 'Tis a Burden that raises those, who carry it, from the Earth; it bears them up, and keeps them from sinking under the many Pressures and Incumbrances of this Life: Which Similitude suits very well with these comfortable Words of our Saviour; *Come all to me that are oppress'd, and I will refresh you; for my Yoke is sweet, and my Burden light:* As if one should say; fear not that I shall lay heavy Burdens on you; I invite you indeed to come and put on my Yoke; but it is to ease and comfort, not to gall or fret you.

'Tis true, the Privilege of Virtue consists not in exempting Men from Suffering. Oh no! The Disciples of the Cross must not pretend to be exempt from Crosses; since their Lord and Master has walk'd before them, carrying his Cross: Nay I flink not to own, that (setting aside those Evils, which are the natural Attendants of Sin) the Crosses of the Just in this Life are generally more numerous, and even heavier in themselves, than those of the Wicked; as being the peculiar Portion of the Just in this Life, and the surest Pledges of God's Love and Favour: But
there

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there is this great Difference between the Crosses of the Just, and those of the Wicked; that whereas these are destitute of all solid Comfort in their Crosses, the Just have, on the contrary, both many Helps to alleviate, and Comforts to sweeten theirs.

The first of these, and Basis of all the rest, is the strengthening Grace of *Jesus Christ*; which, as it is bestowed in greater Abundance on the Just in this Life, so it gives them this Advantage over the Wicked, that they are more powerfully succoured in the carrying of their Crosses: For 'tis by Means of this supernatural Help, that God makes good his Promise of *being always with them in Tribulation*; and that in such a Manner, as to be present to them not only as a Witness or Spectator to encourage them, but as a Partner with them, and Assistant to them in their Labours: If a violent Temptation assaults them, his Grace comes in to their Aid, and makes the Temptation itself turn to the Advantage of their Souls: If the World rises against them, or Persecutions threaten them, God is their Strength and Comfort; his Grace inspires them with Resolution, and they can truly glory with the Psalmist, *The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear what Men shall do to me*: Finally, whatever Cross befalls them, tho' too heavy for
Nature

Nature to bear, God's Grace is All-sufficient to keep them from sinking under it.

So that every virtuous Christian may say with *St. Paul*, *Not I, but God's Grace with me*: And 'tis with Reference to this Divine Assistance we may apply the Words of *Isaiab*, *The Yoke shall be destroyed, because of the Anointing*; that is, the interior Unction of Divine Grace shall so strengthen their Souls, that the Pressures and Afflictions, which would be an intolerable Burthen without it, shall become light and easy with it: For 'tis proportionably with the Soul as with the Body; and as the same Weight, which would bear down and overcome a weakly Body, will perhaps be nothing to one that has his full Strength; so the same Crosses, which with their Weight, would oppress a Soul destitute of the super-abundant Grace *St. Paul* speaks of, shall be chearfully carried by those who are strengthen'd with this super-natural Unction.

It was this gave *St. Paul* the Confidence to boast, *That he could do all Things in him, who comforted him*; which, in effect, was not glorying in his own Strength, but magnifying the Power and Efficacy of God's Grace; which, working in and with his Creatures, renders every Thing, tho' never so contrary to Nature, or above its
Tom. II. O Strength,

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Strength, not only possible, but easy: For which Reason St. *Austin* pray'd thus to Almighty God; *Give, O Lord, what thou commandest, and command whatever thou pleasest*: As if one should say; lend but thy helping Hand, enable me with thy powerful Grace, and then command me to do or suffer any Thing, tho' never so difficult or painful in itself: Because he knew, that as nothing was either impossible or difficult to God's holy Grace, so it render'd all Things even easy to such as are favoured with this heavenly Blessing.

But, besides this peculiar Advantage of virtuous Christians, there is another which makes the bitter Cup of Afflictions go down, not only with Ease, but even with Delight and Pleasure; I mean the *Love of God*, which is predominant in the Hearts of the Just, and increases by the same Degrees as Grace makes its Progress in their Souls. Now Experience tells us what Power Love has over the Heart, and how it sweetens every Thing, tho' never so repugnant to Nature: So that those very Things, which without Love are disagreeable and painful, become pleasing and delightful with it: This appears plainly in natural Love; *as that between Friend and Friend, Parents and Children, Husband and Wife: Do we not find that fourteen
Years

Years of hard Service seemed but as a few Days to *Jacob*, because he had a tender Love for *Rachel*, who was to be the Reward of his Service? Which made *St. Austin* say, that whereas every Thing is painful to one that is cold or indifferent; Love alone takes away all Difficulties, and feels no Pain or Trouble. *Qui amat non laborat.*

If then mere natural Love has such a powerful Charm, as to render all Things easy, can we attribute less to the Love of God, when it has full Possession of the Heart; or wonder it should sweeten the most bitter Cup of Afflictions? The Love of God, I say, which has nothing less than infinite Goodness and Beauty for its Object; and must therefore affect the Heart more powerfully than any other Love, as its Object is more transcendently excellent and charming than any created Object: For if Men can, for the Sake of Persons they love, take Delight in Things that are otherwise painful to Nature, what Wonder is it, that they who love God with their whole Hearts, should find their Joy in suffering for his Sake? Especially when they consider, that nothing happens without his Appointment or Permission; and that whatever happens to them, is designed by him to render them hereafter more

happy in the everlasting Fruition of the Object they love and desire.

I know 'tis usually objected, that our Ideas of spiritual Things, being weak and obscure, cannot by consequence make such lively Impressions upon a sensitive Nature, as those of material Objects, which are conveyed to us by the Ministry and Evidence of our Senses : But tho' something of this may be allowed ; yet if we consider that the peculiar Effect of Grace, where it abounds, is to raise the Soul in some Measure above the Impressions of Flesh and Blood, and that what is wanting of Evidence to the revealed Truths of Faith, is abundantly supplied by their infallible Certainty ; we shall have no Difficulty to conceive, that tho' God be invisible to our corporeal Eyes, the Love of him, as known by a strong and lively Faith, may inflame the Soul more ardently, and work more powerfully upon the Heart, than the most charming Objects of our Senses.

Nor will it appear strange, that a Christian, who is thoroughly penetrated with the sacred Truths delivered in the Gospels, shall not only find sufficient Consolation, but even Joy, in suffering for Love of him, whom he believes to be both infinitely amiable in himself, and infinitely good to his Creatures ; whom he knows to have
laid

laid down his sacred Life for the Love of him, and prepared eternal and incomprehensible Rewards for those that love him: When a Christian, I say, is thoroughly penetrated with these Truths, and his Heart accordingly affected with them, the Sufferings of this Life are then received not only with Submission, but even with Joy.

We have almost as many Instances of this Truth, as there have been Martyrs in God's Church. *St. Paul* says of himself, not only that he rejoiced, but *that he overabounded with Joy in all Tribulation*: And the History of *St. Andrew's* Martyrdom tells us, that this blessed Apostle was even transported with Joy, when he came in Sight of the Cross whereon he was to die: Finally, *St. Luke* relates, that *St. Peter*, and some others, having been publicly scourged by Order of the Jewish Council, departed rejoicing from the Council, because they were thought worthy to suffer Contumely for the Name of Jesus. Oh! 'twas their Love for this sweet Name, that sweeten'd all their Sufferings; that turn'd the Marks of Ignominy and Disgrace into Badges of the greatest Honour; that, finally, bathed their Souls in a Torrent of Delights, whilst their Bodies streamed with Blood, and smarted under the Stripes inflicted by their cruel Tormenters.

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Neither has the Force of this invincible Charm of Divine Love only appeared in the Apostles, but in Thousands of Martyrs, who, in the several Persecutions raised against the Church, have not only laid down their Lives for Christ his Sake, but ever behaved themselves with an undaunted Courage, and even Chearfulness, amidst the most cruel Torments: *They were made to pass through Fire, (says St. Bernard) but their Love could not be burnt; they were put to the Sword, but their Love could not be cut asunder; they were thrown Headlong into the Sea, but their Love could not be drowned:* The Love they had for Jesus Christ render'd them invincible against all the Attempts of Cruelty and Malice.

It was this invincible Power of Divine Love made St. Paul confidently defy any Thing in this World to separate him from Christ: *Who (says he) shall separate us from the Love of Christ? Shall Tribulation or Distress? Or Famine, or Nakedness, or Peril, or the Sword? Nay, in all these Things we overcome through him who has loved us: For I am sure, that neither Death, nor Life, nor Powers, nor Things present, nor to come, shall be able to separate us from the Love of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.* See here the invincible Power of Divine Love: How it raises the Soul above the
World!

World! How it arms her with a certain, irresistible Force and Courage against all the Sufferings of this Life! And 'tis not to be doubted, but the same Cause would produce the same Effect, if we made it but our Business to enkindle this sacred Fire in our Hearts; and, instead of setting our Affections upon earthly Things, we endeavoured, by a daily Progress in Virtue, to make *Jesus Christ* the only Object of our Love.

Now then I dare appeal to any one, whether it be not our Interest, as well as Duty, to make the Study and Practice of Virtue our principal Business? For can there be a State of Happiness under Heaven to be compared to that of a virtuous Christian? Is it not much happier, even as to this World, to be God's Friend, than to be his Enemy? Is not the Testimony of a good Conscience, tho' we should only consult Self-love, preferable to the Uneasiness and Reproaches of a bad one? Finally, is it not much more comfortable to enjoy a constant Peace of Mind, than to repine and fret, and lie at the Mercy of every crossing Accident to vex and torture us? Now 'tis Virtue alone can procure us the Happiness of the one, and deliver us from the Trouble and Vexations of the other: 'Tis Virtue alone can render us

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God's

God's Friends, and the Objects of his Fatherly Love and Protection: Finally, 'tis Virtue alone can give us true Peace of Mind, fix us in an Equality of Temper amidst the Changes and Vicissitudes of human Life, and fill our Hearts with Joy, in Spite of all the crossing Accidents that can befall us.

And what then have we else to do, but to make it our principal Study to advance daily in the Practice of solid Virtue? Since, tho' we had no other Motive to determine us to it, this alone might suffice, *viz.* because we stand continually in Need of a large Stock of Virtue to support us under the necessary Sufferings of this Life: For, as long as we dwell in this Vale of Tears, there is a Necessity of suffering. What Condition soever we make Choice of; what Way soever we turn ourselves, we shall always meet with Crosses: And is it not then our Interest to have it always in our Power to manage them so, as to render them both easy and profitable to us? Now 'tis certain, that nothing but a great Stock of Virtue can procure us this Blessing; for how is it possible we should have any Comfort in our Lives, as long as we are impatient and fretful upon every trifling Accident that thwarts our Inclinations? Must not that Person be a continual Torment

nt to himself, whose Pride makes him
ble to brook the least Neglect, or even
ginary Affront? Whose Impatience
kes every light Cross an insupportable
fiction to him? Finally, whose Sloth
is every little Duty into an intolerable
sk? Oh! if we had once deeply set-
l in our Souls the Habits of Patience,
mility, Submission to the Will of God,
other such like charming Virtues, Ex-
ience would soon convince us, that there
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them; and that with them alone any
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py. What stronger Inducement there-
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e true and solid Happiness, even in this
e, is the immediate Fruit of it; and
it is still far more, eternal Happiness
ends upon it, as being the undoubted
ward of Virtue in the Life to come.

The XLth ENTERTAINMENT.

Christ's Love in suffering and dying
for us.

*Herein we know the Love of God, because
he has laid down his Life for us. 1 Joh.
iii. 16.*

THESE Words of St. *John* import no less, than that our Saviour's laying down his Life for us, is such an unparallel'd Instance of his Love, that from it alone we can truly judge to what Degree he has loved us: *Herein we know the Love of God, because he has laid down his Life for us.* All other Favours, tho' great in themselves, are in a Manner eclipsed by it, and seem to lose their Value in the Comparison: It is on this Account the Church, in her Preface upon *Holy Saturday*, sets forth the Greatness of this Blessing, even with a lessening Reflection upon the Benefit of Creation: *For what (says she) would it have availed us to have been born, had we not also been redeemed?* And in the same Preface she expresses her grateful Sense of it in these Terms: *Oh! wonderful Condescension of thy Goodness towards us!*
Ob!

Oh ! inestimable Force of Love ! to redeem a Slave, thou hast delivered up thy only Son.

This plainly shews the high Idea the Church has of Christ's Love, in suffering and dying for us : And since no Consideration can be more powerful to inflame us with the Love of God, nor by Consequence furnish us with a stronger Motive to hate Sin, which is God's Enemy ; the Subject of this Entertainment shall be some Reflections upon this surpassing Instance of our Saviour's Love ; whence I shall take Occasion to shew, what-Influence it ought to have upon our Practice.

It is related, in the 11th Chapter of St. *John*, that Christ being about to raise *Lazarus* to Life, was observed to weep. Some of the *Jews* then present, attributing his Tears to a natural Tenderness, and Grief for the Party deceased, said to each other with a kind of Admiration, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum !* See how he loved him ! Now if the *Jews* concluded, from our Saviour's Tears, that he had a more than ordinary Kindness for *Lazarus*, and at the same Time seemed to admire his Goodness in the tender Concern he shewed on that Occasion ; when therefore we see him shed not a few Tears, but the last Drop of his most precious Blood ; when we see him
covered

Covered all over with Wounds, as so many Eyes weeping Blood for Man; with what Astonishment ought we to cry, *Ecce quomodo amabat eum!* See how he loved him!

However, tho' we must own indeed, the *Jews* had Reason enough to conclude, from our Saviour's weeping for *Lazarus*, that he had a great Affection for him; yet, humanly speaking, there appeared but little Reason for their being any ways surprized at it; because it was well known, that *Lazarus* had always been much devoted both to Christ and his Apostles, and had in all Likelihood contributed very liberally towards their Subsistence: But if in his Life-time he had been a declared Enemy to him, and one of those who thirsted after his Blood, there had been Ground enough for Wonder and Astonishment, if Christ had notwithstanding given so remarkable a Demonstration of his Kindness for him, as even to honour him with his Tears; because to love an Enemy was a Virtue unknown amongst the *Jews*, and much more to love him so, as to be sensibly affected with his Misfortunes: And how then ought we to be transported with Astonishment, when we see him love Sinners, who are truly his Enemies, so as to lay down his sacred Life, and suffer the most cruel Torments to deliver them from
eternal

eternal Death! This indeed is such an excess of Love, as justly challenges our highest Admiration, and obliges all Mankind to proclaim the Wonder of it, and cry out with all the Sense of Gratitude, their Hearts are capable of, *See how he loved him!*

Oh see and weigh it well; consider every Circumstance of it. The Angels offended God but once in Thought, and were immediately condemn'd to everlasting Flames: And why then were we more favourably dealt with? There is no Reason to be given for it but God's infinite Mercy, which was wholly gratuitous and undeserved. He justly condemned the Angels; and had not his Mercy interposed, all Mankind had fallen under the same Condemnation: For as we were their Fellow-Criminals, if pure Justice had given Sentence, our Doom had been the same with theirs, and Heaven for ever shut against us: But Almighty God out of an excess of Goodness, to which we had no Title, was pleased from all Eternity to cast a merciful Regard upon us, and provide an Expedient to *cancel the Hand-writing, that was against us*, and rescue us from the Punishment our Sins had deserved.

Yet all this while, God clearly saw, how much this infinite Mercy would be undervalued and abused. He foresaw, that tho'
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the Mercy he design'd was to be general and common to all, the greatest Part of Mankind would, through their own Malice, frustrate all the Ends of it; some by disowning the Favour, and others by neglecting to apply to their Souls the Fruit of it, and even turning it into an Occasion of their greater Ruin. Finally, he foresaw, that notwithstanding all the Means he should provide to deliver them from the Slavery of Sin, innumerable Souls would be so little sensible of the Blessing offered them, as to choose to continue under their Bondage, rather than contribute any Endeavours towards the Happiness he should purchase for them. It was under this Prospect he decreed our Ransom; nor could the certain Foresight of so general an Ungratitude provoke him to the least Abatement of his intended Bounty.

And here we ought particularly to admire his infinite Goodness in providing not a barely necessary, but even a *plentiful Redemption* for those, who he knew would make so little Use of it. For tho' his Wisdom had the Choice of many both easy and effectual Expedients to wrest us from the Power of Darkeness, his Love would pitch upon no other than the Incarnation and Death of his only Son; and a Death as ignominious and cruel in all its Circumstances

stances as could be inflicted on the most infamous Malefactor: Whereas nothing is more certain, than that one single Drop of Blood, nay, one single Tear shed by the Son of God, would according to the strictest Laws of Justice have made full Atonement for all our Sins; because the Dignity of his Person being infinite, it follows that the least Humiliation of the Son of God, offer'd by way of Atonement, was a Satisfaction of infinite Value, and by consequence sufficient to clear all Debts, and *cancel the whole Hand-writing. that was against us.*

But what was abundantly sufficient to satisfy God's Justice, could not satisfy his Love. Oh! 'twas his Love for Man, and nothing but his Love, made him spill that sacred Blood; each Drop whereof was the full Price of the World's Redemption, as prodigally, as if it had been the Blood of some vile Slave. It was Love made him undergo both the Confusion and Torment of a publick Scourging, executed with the utmost Barbarity: It was Love made him exchange his heavenly Diadem for a painful Crown of Thorns; his Robes of Immortality for a Fool's Coat; and his Joys at the right Hand of his Father, for Torments amidst Murderers and Thieves: Finally, 'twas the Force of Love made him
hang

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hang for three whole Hours on the Cross, labouring under unspeakable Tortures, and exposed to the Insults and Scoffs of his Enemies. *See how he loved him !*

You will say perhaps ; Why then would our Saviour choose to suffer such a painful Death, if it was not necessary for Man's Redemption ? I answer ; that tho' it was not absolutely necessary for Man's Redemption, it was at least Useful for our Example and Instruction : And therefore our Saviour chose not to come in quality of our Redeemer only, but also to be our Master and Guide : Our Master to teach us the Way to Heaven, and our Guide to walk it before us. His Life was to be the Model of ours, and his Death an everlasting Source of Grace to our Souls. His Poverty was to confound our Love of Riches ; his Humility to cure our Pride ; and his painful Sufferings to put out of Countenance our eager Pursuit of Ease and Pleasures. 'Tis certain, if what sufficed to pay our Ransom could have satisfied his Love, all that precious Blood, so prodigally spilt, might have been spared : But to shew how dear our Salvation was to him, he stuck at nothing that might any ways promote it, or encourage us to put in Practice the Means he should mark out for our attaining to it. *See how he loved him !*

O Divine Redeemer! How dear has it cost thee to save my sinful Soul! My sinful Soul, I say, which will perhaps be yet so cruel to herself, and ungrateful to thee, as to defeat all thy designs of Love; to frustrate all thy Pains and Labours; and lastly, to lose and damn herself in spite of all thou hast done and suffered to redeem and save her. Is it then possible, that after such demonstrations of Love, we can have the Hearts to continue thy Enemies! Can we do any Thing but love thee! Can our Lives be directed to any other End than to promote the Honour and Interest of thy holy Name!

But, alas, in spite of all the most endearing Engagements to love, Men usually remain as cold, as if Almighty God had done nothing for them: So that it is hard to determine, which is the most astonishing Wonder of the two; God's Love for Man, or Man's Ingratitude to God: That God should die for us, even when we were the Objects of his just Hatred; or that after he has died and suffered such Torments for us, we should make so small a Matter of still deserving by repeated Provocations to continue under his Displeasure: For, suppose the very meanest Wretch upon Earth had but lost a Leg or Arm out of pure Kindness for any of us; should we not have
a hearty

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a hearty Love for him, and take all Occasions to testify our Gratitude to him? And is it not then monstrous, that after the Son of God has even lost his Life, and sacrificed himself wholly out out of pure Love for us, we should remain insensible of the Obligation, and even repay him with Offences and Ingratitude! But let us now at least begin to make him some better Return; and in order to it, let us consider how this may be put in Practice by Persons of all States and Conditions.

The second Book of *Kings* has furnished me with a Passage very applicable to our present Purpose. We read there, that when *Absolon's* Rebellion first broke out, and *David* was preparing to march against him, there happened to be at Court, one *Etbai* a Foreigner, and Subject of the King of *Geth*. *David* being unwilling to expose this noble Youth to any Hazard, exhorted him to return home, and not involve himself in the Dangers of a civil War. But *Etbai* being resolved to share with *David* in his adverse as well as prosperous Fortune, made him this generous Answer. *As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the King liveth, in what Place soever my Lord the King shall be, whether in Life or Death, there also will thy Servant be.* This generous Resolution of *Etbai* proceeded doubtless from the

the sincere Love and Affection he had for *David*; and contains a great Instruction for all Christians, teaching them how they ought to be affected in their Hearts, and behave themselves in all incident Occasions towards their Lord and Sovereign *Jesus Christ*, of whom *David* was a Figure. Let us now make the Application.

It is certain, that the only acceptable Return we can make to Christ for his Love in laying down his Life for us, is to love him with our whole Hearts. Now Love, if it be sincere, is not an idle or unactive Virtue, which can lie hid in the Soul without manifesting itself by outward Works; for if it be there, it will certainly put us upon Action: It will set all the Powers of the Soul at Work to study and follow in all Things the divine Will and Pleasure; and as the Love which *Ethai* had for *David* made him in the very first Occasion that presented itself, readily offer his Service to him, even with the Hazard of his Life; so will the Love of God, if hearty and sincere, in all Occurrences whatever, move the Will to espouse God's Cause, though Life and all must be sacrificed in the Defence of it. So that a true lover of Christ will be ever ready to make good this generous Protestation of *Ethai*; *in whatever Place my Lord shall be, whether in Life or Death,*
there

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there also will thy Servant be ; that is, he will choose to suffer any Extremities, and even Death itself, rather than depart from his Lord and Master upon any worldly Considerations.

However, there is a great Difference betwixt *Ethai's* Case in Relation to *David*, and ours in Reference to God. But the Difference makes only to our Confusion, if we shew ourselves less resolute and zealous in God's Service, than he was to serve the King: Because what *Ethai* did for *David*, was done *Gratis*. For he had no Obligation to hazard his Life in his Cause ; whereas if God should please to demand it of us, we are bound by all the Ties both of Gratitude and Fidelity to obey his Orders. We are bound in Gratitude, because he has already laid down his Life for us ; and we are likewise bound in Virtue of our Allegiance, because we have sworn Fidelity to him at the Font ; and he being our sovereign Lord, 'tis our indispensable Duty to sacrifice our Lives for him, and suffer Death rather than abandon or betray his Cause.

'Tis true, we may perhaps never be in the Occasion of giving him these Testimonies of the Love we owe him ; but we are always bound to be heartily prepared for it ; and it will easily appear by our Behaviour

Behaviour in other lesser Occasions, whether this Disposition be truly in our Hearts: For tho' there be but few that have the Opportunity to die for Christ, no Man wants the Opportunity of suffering something for him; because every one is almost daily in the Occasions of suffering something for Virtue or Conscience-sake; and whatever is suffer'd on this Score, is suffer'd for Christ. So that struggling with Difficulties in the discharge of necessary Duties, mortifying our Passions, avoiding the Occasions of Sin, daily Combating against some sinful Habit, and the like, is all suffering for Christ; and tho' it be not dying for him, 'tis at least dying to ourselves for his Sake. To say nothing of the Crosses we daily meet with: For what Way soever they happen to us, to bear them with a Christian Patience is likewise suffering for Christ.

Now then, if we pretend to love him so, as to be ready to follow him *in Life and Death*, we must shew it by our Behaviour in these sorts of Trials; and since we be not in the Occasion of sacrificing our Lives for him; let us give him at least some Proof of our Readiness for it, by daily sacrificing to him what we can. As for instance, let us sacrifice our *Ease* to him, whenever any Duty calls upon us; let us sacrifice our *Tongues*, either by speaking, when the Good of our Neighbour requires it; or by our *Silence*

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Silence, when it is unreasonable to speak; let us sacrifice our *Eyes*, by checking their Curiosity to look at dangerous Objects; our *Ears*, by stopping them to defamatory or immodest Discourses; our *Hands* and *Feet*, by employing them according to the Order of Providence in the Duties of our Calling; let us sacrifice our sinful Habits; our *Intemperance*, by avoiding all Occasions of Excess in Drinking; our *passionate* and *hasty Temper*, by practising Meekness, amidst Provocations to Anger; our *impure Inclinations*, by resisting their solicitations to Sin.

Finally, let us sacrifice our *Wills*, by denying them all sinful or dangerous Pleasures: For by this Method we give in a Manner our *Lives* for Christ, by living daily to him; and tho' we fall not Victims to him all at once, we sacrifice ourselves by Piece-meals, and every Part of our *Lives* is consecrated by the many reiterated Oblations of what we daily give to him. Nor is it to be doubted but if we be ready in all incident Occasions to make these small Acknowledgments of our Love and Gratitude; we have just Reason to hope we shall not be wanting to our Duty in greater Trials, and that we are truly disposed to follow Christ in Life and Death. But if we be generally unfaithful to him in these
lesser

leſſer Occaſions, whatever we may fancy or pretend in Words, we have but little Reason to think we love God with our whole Hearts, or that we are ready to lay down our Lives for him.

It is here then we are chiefly to examine ourſelves; not whether we have juſt Ideas of the Love of God, or make frequent Acts of it with our Lips; but whether we have effectually an Inclination in our Hearts to ſerve, obey, and pleaſe him in all Things; whether we conſult his Will in all our deliberate Actions: And if upon Enquiry we find this Love ſo prevalent in us, as to ſee nothing to the contrary, but that we are regularly directed and influenced by it in the main Body of our daily Actions, we have then Reason to hope, the Love of God has taken Poſſeſſion of our Hearts. But if none of theſe favourable Symptoms appear, we ought to conclude all is not found within; and never be at Reſt till by God's Grace, we find ſo far a Change as to break reſolutely through all Obſtacles to our Duty, and renounce whatever we know to be diſpleaſing to God.

In order therefore to work ourſelves, with the Help of his holy Grace, into this Diſpoſition let us frequently raiſe our Hearts to God with this holy Reſolution of *St. Auſtin, I will love thee, Lord, becauſe thou haſt loved me firſt.* He has certainly
loved

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loved us first, because he loved us when we were his Enemies, and loved us so, as to lay down his sacred Life for us; for us, poor Worms of the Earth; for us, most wretched and ungrateful Sinners. But shall we always be thus wilfully unhappy? Shall we always persist in our wonted Ingratitude? Shall we ever continue thus insensible, and make him no Return for his infinite Love? Oh! that we had begun to love him as soon as the Use of Reason render'd us capable of paying him this Tribute! That we had been sensible of this great Duty before corrupt Nature had gain'd Ground upon us, and subjected us to the Tyranny of those sinful Habits, which we have now such Difficulty to overcome!

But what then, must we, like the wretched *Judas*, despair either of the Grace or Mercy of our divine Redeemer? Oh! no, we know his Grace is able to change the most corrupt Heart, and his Mercy to pardon the greatest Sins. We must therefore rather imitate the happy *Magdalene*, and like her endeavour to deserve the Pardon of our many Sins by *loving much*. The Consideration of past Sins must be so far from disheartening us, that it ought rather to spur us on the faster; and by continually putting us in mind how ill we have hitherto requited his infinite Love, quicken our Zeal
and

and Fervour, and hasten us on to satisfy as far as we are able, for the long Arrears of so many Years Love already due to him. And since no Love can be sincere, unless it appears in a true Change of Life, we must resolve henceforward to declare a vigorous War against our sinful Habits, and never cease fighting against them, till we weaken them so, as to force them to yield to the Power of his holy Grace: And tho' we may sometimes be wounded in this holy War, we must not loose Courage, nor lay down our Arms; but have immediately Recourse to the powerful Remedies provided in this Case: For we must have an assured Confidence in his infinite Goodness, that if we heartily detest our Sins, and continue with unwearied Patience to strive against them, he will have Pity on us at length, and crown our Endeavours with Success; because we know, he came to seek and heal such Sinners, and suffer'd the Death of the Cross to obtain Grace and Victory for them.

Arm'd therefore with this hearty Confidence, and humbly prostrate before thee, our Saviour and Redeemer, we presume to make the same Request, which a poor Sinner like ourselves made to thee in the midst of all thy Torments, and received even more than he had the Confidence to

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ask. Our humble Request then is, that thou wilt remember us in thy Mercy at the last Day. We confess we have no other Title to this Favour, than what he had, *viz.* thy own infinite Goodness. For surely that Title is as good now as it was then, because thy Mercies are always the same: And tho' thy sacred Arms are not now stretch'd out upon the Cross as then, they are still wide open, and stretch'd forth to receive all penitent Sinners, who have a Confidence in thy Mercies.

Grant then, Divine Redeemer, that at our parting Hour, we may hear that joyful Sentence, which thou hadst the Goodness to pronounce in Favour of that happy Sinner, who died with thee on Mount *Calvary*. O grant us this, we humbly beseech thee, by thy bitter Death and Passion; by all thou hast done and suffer'd for us: And, that our Souls may be worthily disposed for this great Blessing, grant that we may now begin to love thee with our whole Hearts, and with all our Powers; and that we may never cease to love thee to our dying Day; for then we shall be sure to love and possess thee for all Eternity.

The

The XLIIId ENTERTAINMENT.

Christ the Pattern of suffering Christians.

I have a Baptism to be baptized with, and how am I streighten'd, till it be accomplish'd. Luke xii. 50.

CHRIST calls his Passion a *Baptism*, or Washing; to represent the large Effusion of Blood, which the Work of our Redemption was to cost him: Which however was so far from casting any Damp or Terror upon him, that he complain'd *his Heart was streighten'd*; that is, violently press'd with the vehement Desire he had to have it accomplish'd. Here we see the Virtue of Patience and Love of Suffering, carried to its highest Degree of Perfection, in the Person of *Jesus Christ*, whom all Christians are bound to make their Pattern. The Subject then of this Entertainment shall be, to shew the earnest Desire our Saviour had to suffer for us, and how we ought to imitate him in it.

It is an undoubted Maxim in Divinity, that every Action of Christ was of infinite Value, and consequently sufficient to atone

for all the Sins of the World. Hence therefore we may justly conclude, that whatever Torments he was pleased to endure in the Time of his Passion, must be attributed to the Desire he had to suffer for us, as being over and above the full Price of our Ransom. His whole Life indeed was a continual Series of Sufferings, and not one of all these happen'd to him, but by his own free Choice. His Infancy was spent in Banishment, and the rest of his Years pass'd either in Obscurity, or the Hardships of a poor Tradesman's Life, or in the more laborious Functions of his Mission, and Persecutions of his Enemies; so that whatever Part of his Life we consider, the Prophet's Character, that he was *a Man of Sorrow*, was fully made out.

However, tho' every Part of his Life had its full Portion of Sufferings, the largest Share was reserved for the last Part of it; to which the other were but as light Skirmishes, if compared with the Bloody Combat on Mount *Calvary*; which, as it was the End for which he came into the World, so the most considerable Events of his Life seem'd all to have a Tendency to it; as the Poverty of his Parents, the Lowness of his Condition, his Retirement in *Egypt*, and the Obscurity of his Education at *Nazareth*; all which seem'd as intended

tended to extinguish the Memory of the Wonders that had happen'd at his Birth, which might otherwise have drawn the Eyes of Men upon him, and frustrated the main Design of consummating the work of Man's Redemption by the Ignominy of the Cross.

'Tis true, the Lustre of his Preaching and Miracles after his manifesting himself to the World, seem'd sufficient to keep him out of the Reach of so cruel and shameful a Death: But they had their Allay appointed to obscure them. His Doctrine was wonderful indeed, and his Miracles surprising; but his Condition was poor, his Conversation plain and simple, and his Person without any worldly Character or Ornament to distinguish it; and all these served as a Counterpoise to the Power of his Words and Works: His Followers also, tho' numerous, being mostly of the meaner Sort, contributed rather to lessen him, than gain him Credit or Authority: Nay, his very Preaching and Miracles, which in all likelihood should have got him most Friends, and greatest Reputation, were by the Malice of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, turn'd against him, and permitted by God to be the principal Occasion of his Death.

Now, who can after all this, doubt but that Suffering and Dying for us on the Cross, was what he earnestly thirsted after ; since it was the End, to which he directed the most considerable Events and Circumstances of his Life ; disposing Things so by his infinite Wisdom, that not only the most remote and unconnected Accidents in Appearance, should have a Tendency to it, but that even those Things which of themselves seem'd most proper to hinder it, should most immediately contribute to it.

However, there are some particular Passages of our Saviour's Life set down by the Evangelists, which so clearly discover the earnest Desire he had to drink the bitter Cup of his Passion, that I cannot omit a short Recital of them. The first that offers itself, is the pressing Hastē he always shew'd in Relation to his Death: For when the Time of it was now drawing near, he acquainted his Apostles with his Resolution of going up to *Jerusalem*; knowing that was the Theatre, on which this bloody Tragedy was to be acted; and that they might be assured he went to meet his Death, and that nothing should happen to him without his Foresight and Permission, he gave them a large Account of all the most considerable Circumstances of the
Death

Death he was to suffer ; and 'tis expressly observed by two of the Evangelists, that our Saviour having ended his Discourse, *began to walk before his Apostles.*

Now, humanly speaking, one would have thought this Circumstance too trivial to deserve the particular Notice of two of the four Evangelists. For what should it import us to know whether Christ walk'd before or behind, or in the Midst of the Apostles ? And yet their insisting so nicely upon a Circumstance, which in itself appears to be of no Consequence, shews plainly, that some important Instruction is couch'd under it ; and I find that spiritual Authors in their Reflections upon this Passage, generally observe, that the Haste and Eagerness our Saviour shew'd in this Occasion was altogether an Effect of the pressing Desire he had to accomplish the work of Man's Redemption : Nay, 'tis observable, that the nearer he approach'd to the Time of his Passion, the more this pressing Haste, and Eagerness seem'd to increase upon him.

For being now at his last Supper, some few Hours before his entering into the Garden of *Gethsemini*, he seem'd to be under a certain holy Impatience to have the Hour of his Passion come on ; as appears plainly in these his Words to *Judas* ; *what thou de-*

signest to do, do with Speed. Which were not spoken to spur him on to Evil, but to express his eager Desire to suffer for us: Supper therefore being ended, he goes without Delay to the Garden of *Gethsemini*, where he knew he was to be deliver'd into the Hands of his Enemies: And when the Moment was now come, as soon as he perceived the Traitor making up towards him at the Head of a Troop of Soldiers, starting up from his Prayers, he hasten'd to his Disciples to bring them the News of it, and bid them rise without Delay: But what's the meaning of this great Haste? He has explain'd it both by Words and Actions: *Behold* (says he) *the Hour is come, and the Son of Man shall be deliver'd into the Hands of Sinners: Behold the Man that will betray me, is approaching.*

Then making up to *Judas*, as *St. John* relates, he calls him *Friend*, embraces him, and receives his Kifs, as knowing that to be the Signal agreed upon with those that came to seize him. Yet lest the Soldiers should mistake some one of the Apostles for him, he told them no less than thrice, that himself was the Person they fought for. Whereupon the Soldiers falling backwards over, like Men Thunder-struck, he made Use of his extraordinary Power to raise them again: By the same
miraculous

miraculous Power, restoring the Ear of *Malchus* cut off by *Peter*, he check'd him severely for drawing his Sword in his Defence, asking him, *whether he would not have him drink the Cup his Father had given him*: Then delivering himself up freely to the Soldiers, he gave them full Power to satisfy their Rage upon his sacred Person. All which Particulars shew plainly, how our Saviour was affected in Relation to his Passion, and the ardent Desire he had to have it accomplish'd.

But if any one objects, that it seems somewhat hard to conceive, how so great and pressing a Desire, as I have shew'd our Saviour had to suffer and die for us, can be consistent either with that violent Conflict, or the subject of his Prayer in the Garden, where he expressly declared that *his Soul was sorrowful even unto Death*, and with repeated Instances beseeched his Father, that if it were possible, *the bitter Cup of his Passion might pass from him*. I answer, that we must distinguish between the Impressions and Fears of infirm Nature on the one Hand, and the Desires of the Heart on the other: For we must not imagine, that our Saviour, as Man, was of a Nature insensible of Grief or Pain, or wore not the same Flesh and Blood, as other Mortals do; since the Prophet *Isaiab* says of him, that he
bore

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bore our Infirmities ; and St. Paul to the Hebrews tells us, *that he was in all Things tried as we are, yet without Sin* ; that is, was liable to the same Impressions of Nature as other Men. So that Nature in him had its Fears, Repugnances, and Impressions of Grief and Sadness just as it has in us : But with this Difference, that as his Heart and Will were always perfectly subject to God, so were those sensible Impressions of infirm Nature also perfectly subject to the Government of his Reason.

This being supposed, 'tis easy to shew, how that inward conflict of Nature, which broke forth into Streams of Blood, was not at all repugnant to the Desire he had to suffer for us : For though Nature fear'd, tho' Nature labour'd under a heavy Load of Grief, and cry'd out for Relief, yet the Desires of his Heart remain'd immoveably fix'd in God. and perfectly conform'd to the divine Pleasure, which he knew was no other than that he should suffer and die for us. Nature indeed was startled at the near Prospect of the frightful Torments he was to undergo, and therefore acted her Part in crying out, *Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me.* This was the Language of Flesh and Blood ; but the Language and sincere Desire of his Heart was, *nevertheless, Father, not mine but thy Will be done ;*

done ; because what Nature regarded as an Evil, and by consequence as an Object of Fear, his Reason considering the Will of God in it, regarded as a very great Good : And therefore whilst Flesh and Blood labour'd under the most sensible Apprehensions of approaching Death and Torments, and sought to be deliver'd from them, his Heart and Will embraced them with Joy, and desired nothing more than that whatever his Father had decree'd, should be fully accomplish'd in him.

So that all these *Fears, Repugnances, Strifes, and Outcries* of the inferiour Part of the Soul, were perfectly over-ruled by a strong and efficacious Desire to accomplish the Will of God his Father ; and as on the one Hand, he would both suffer those sensible Impressions of infirm Nature, and make them known to us, that we might not be dishearten'd, or think all were lost, when we should find ourselves labouring under the like Infirmities ; so on the other, he would not to permit them to affect any ways his Heart or Will, to set us a perfect Pattern of Patience and Resignation under the heaviest Load of Pressures and Afflictions. In a Word, it was for our Comfort he submitted to them, and he overcame them for our Example and Instruction : Because by the one he shew'd what
might

might be allow'd to the Infirmities of Nature, and by the other he taught us how the Heart and Will ought to be disposed: Now let us see how we must imitate this excellent Pattern.

It is not to be doubted, but when a Person is under any great Affliction, natural Infirmary must have its Grains of Allowance: For as long as the Soul is lodg'd in a frail and mortal Body, do what you will, Nature will in some Degree take its own Course, and act like itself: It will grieve, repine, shed Tears, complain, seek Comfort, and the like. For Sighs, and Tears, Complaints and Moanings, are the natural Language of Persons in Affliction: But then Care must be taken that whilst Nature is allow'd to act its Part, God's Cause be not abandon'd. Care, I say, must be taken, that amidst those sensible Impressions of Grief and Trouble, the Heart and Will remain immoveably fix'd in God, and perfectly resign'd to the Divine Appointment. So that if Nature cries out, *Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me*, the Heart must immediately answer, *nevertheless, not mine, but thy Will be done*. If Nature struggles under the Weight of its Sufferings, and seeks for Relief, the Heart and Will must be so disposed, as to choose effectually the Continuance of
of

of them, if it be God's Will, rather than with his Displeasure to purchase a Deliverance from them.

And since this is the Duty of every Christian, it follows, that we are likewise bound to use our utmost Endeavours to moderate our natural *Fears, Sorrows, Repugnances, and Desires*, at least so far, as to take care, that they have no Influence upon the Heart, to the Prejudice of that entire Submission we owe to the Will of God. Because the great Danger of an over-violent Fear, Sadness, Repugnance, or Desire is, that such like Passions, when we give too much Way to them, are apt to engage the Heart in their Interest; and then the Will, instead of being the Mistress, becomes their Slave, and betrays God's Cause. Whence we may clearly gather, that the Virtues of Patience and Religation, consist not in a sort of stupid Insensibility, such as certain Heathen Philosophers had the Vanity to pretend to, but in that Christian Disposition of the Heart, which makes us effectually approve of, and submit to all the Methods of God's Providence over us, though never so contrary to the Desires and Inclinations of Nature.

Neither does the Perfection of those Virtues consist in a Love or Desire of sufferings for their own Sake, but precisely as
the

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the Will of God is considered in them. For (as St. *Austin* says) *no Man loves the Thing he suffers, though he loves to suffer* : Because the Things we suffer, being either real or supposed Evils, can in themselves neither be the Objects of Love nor Desire ; but to suffer them in Conformity and Obedience to the Will of God, is the proper Object both of the one and the other. And 'tis not to be doubted but the Apostles upon this Motive, both loved and desired to suffer : Since it is writ of them, that *they departed rejoicing from the Council, because they were thought worthy to suffer Contumely for the Name of Jesus* : And St. *Paul* declares of himself, *that he was exceeding Joyful in all Tribulation* : To say nothing of so many Thousands of Martyrs, who, in Imitation of their Saviour and Redeemer, hastened to Death and Torments, with the same Alacrity and Joy as to a Triumph.

Now all Joy in the Possession of any Thing being grounded on the Love and Desire we have of it, 'tis evident, those holy Martyrs had a real Desire to suffer : Not a Desire of natural Inclination ; for Death and Torments are always frightful to Nature ; but a Desire of the Heart and Will, which, as it was the prevailing Inclination of their Souls, over-ruled all the contrary Inclinations of Nature, and made them
ready

ready to suffer a thousand Deaths, rather than dishonour or betray the Cause of their heavenly Master. 'Twas a Desire grounded upon the firm Faith they had, that their only true and solid Happiness consisted in having the Will of God accomplished in them; though with the Loss of all they possessed in the World, even Life itself: And therefore when the Event of Things clearly convinced them that Almighty God was pleased to call them to such hard Trials, they heartily rejoiced in having so favourable an Occasion to shew their Fidelity to him.

This then is that holy Disposition we ought to enter into, and arm ourselves with against all the Troubles, Persecutions, Crosses and Afflictions incident to human Life: For we must not imagine as if none besides the Apostles or canonized Saints were concerned in the Obligation of imitating their heavenly Master in this difficult Point; since St. *Peter* has declared it to be a Part of every Christian's Calling: *Hereunto* (says he) *ye are called, because Christ also suffered for us, that we may follow his Footsteps.* So that Patience under Adversity, Resignation to the Will of God, and a hearty Readiness to suffer whatever Crosses he shall please to send us, are the essential Qualifications of a Disciple of Christ.

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Christ. *Whoever (says Christ) will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow me : And again, He who carries not his Cross, and follows me, is not worthy of me.* These are the Rules he has set to all his Disciples ; that is, to all that profess themselves Christians, who therefore ought to be always in a chearful Readiness to put them in Practice.

And truly, since our Circumstances here in *England*, where we are under the Lash of the severest Penal Laws, are such, that we can never be sure, but we may sooner or later be put to the Trial, whether we are truly Disciples of Christ ; we ought to arm ourselves before-hand with all the Virtues necessary to support us in the Day of Battle, that when it comes, we may then resolutely stand our Ground, and like those valiant Champions of Christ, who sacrificed all they had for the Interest of his Name, fight courageously under his Standard, by choosing to undergo the greatest Extremities, rather than abandon the Cause of Justice, or depart from our Duty to God.

But then we must take care to prepare ourselves for those greater Trials, by our Fidelity to him in lesser ones : For if we permit ourselves to be overcome by Dwarfs and Pigmies, how shall we be able to
grapple

grapple with Giants? If our Patience yields under every trifling Accident that crosses our Humours, how will it hold out under a violent Persecution? If our Sloth and Love of Ease makes us indulge ourselves in every Thing; if we have not Courage to use at least so much Violence to our Inclinations, as to conquer the Repugnance we have to very easy Duties, how shall we have Strength and Resolution enough to surmount Difficulties which will try the Constancy and Virtue even of the most zealous Christians?

It is an easy Matter to flatter ourselves with seeming Resolutions of doing great Things, whilst the Danger is at a Distance; but it is most certain, that they, who are now so addicted to their Ease and Pleasures, as to be unwilling to put themselves to any Inconvenience for God's Service, will be in great Danger of quitting the Cause of Justice and Religion, when their standing to it must expose them to great Sufferings and Troubles.

We must therefore begin now to train ourselves up to these difficult Combats; *first*, by a great Fervour and Assiduity in Prayer; *secondly*, by a constant Practice of Patience in the small Crosses we daily meet with; and, *thirdly*, by denying ourselves

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selves many Things, to which we are inclined: For by this Method, if it shall please Almighty God to call us to harder Trials, we shall be better able to resign ourselves in all Things to his holy Will and Pleasure.

The End of the SECOND VOLUME.



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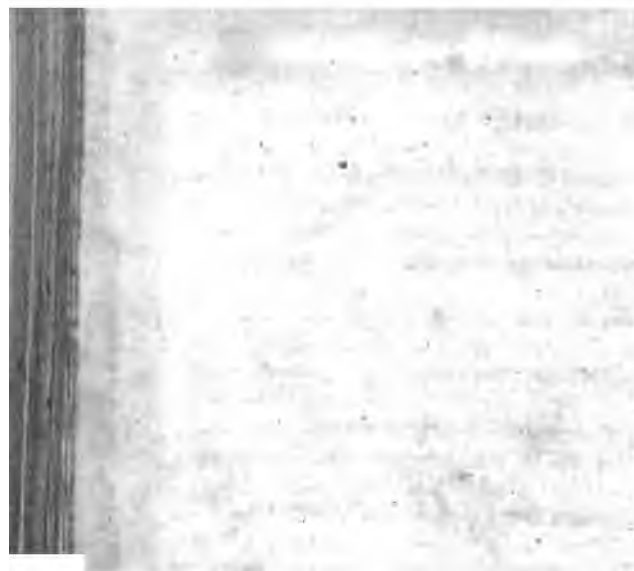
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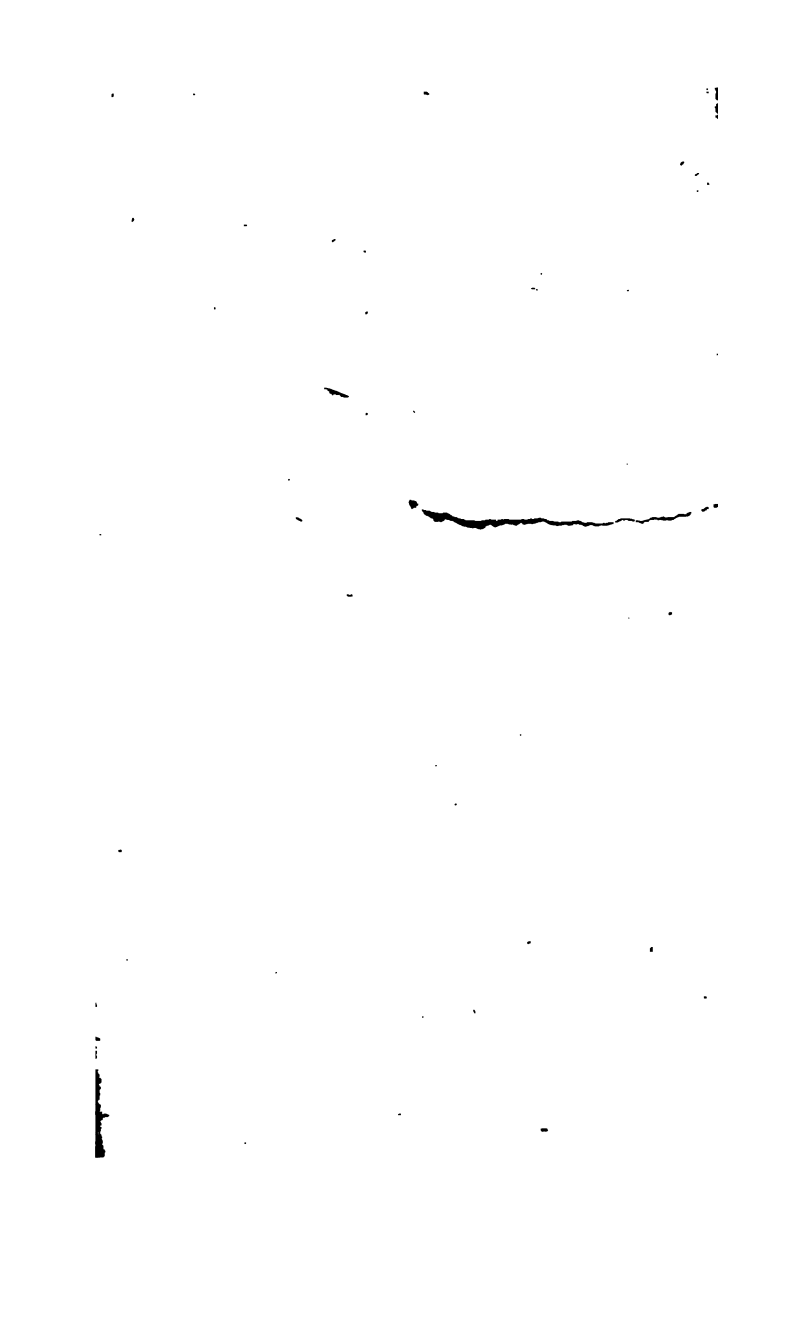
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